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A HISTORY OF THE CROW'S NEST PASS

by

WILLIAM JAMES COUSINS

Thesis
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A HISTORY OF THE CROW'S NEST PASS

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

A HISTORY OF THE CROW'S NEST PASS

BY

WILLIAM JAMES COUSINS

An examination of the development of an important coal-mining areas in Alberta and British Columbia from the discovery of the pass to the present. The thesis gives an account of social and economic development based on government reports, newspapers, the writer's personal knowledge and interviews with resident's of long standing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 1 | THE PASS TODAY | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 | THE EXTENT OF THE PASS | 14 |
| CHAPTER 3 | PLACE NAMES | 21 |
| CHAPTER 4 | THE DISCOVERY OF THE PASS | 26 |
| CHAPTER 5 | THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY | 43 |
| CHAPTER 6 | THE FOUNDING OF THE TOWNS | 51 |
| CHAPTER 7 | THE END OF THE BOOM AND READJUSTMENT | 75 |
| CHAPTER 8 | LIFE IN THE EARLY PERIOD | 84 |
| CHAPTER 9 | THE PASS FROM WORLD WAR I TO THE DEPRESSION . . | 94 |
| CHAPTER 10 | THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II | 107 |
| CHAPTER 11 | ACCIDENTS AND CATASTROPHES | 122 |
| CHAPTER 12 | THE FRANK SLIDE | 134 |
| CHAPTER 13 | INDUSTRY, OTHER THAN COAL MINING | 142 |
| CHAPTER 14 | COAL MINING | 151 |
| CHAPTER 15 | MINERS' UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS . . . | 169 |
| CHAPTER 16 | THE PEOPLE | 177 |
| CHAPTER 17 | THE PRESS | 193 |
| CHAPTER 18 | THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE | 200 |
| APPENDIX | • • • • • | 206 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | • • • • • | 212 |

* * *

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| MOUNTAINS AND COAL | 1a |
| THE EFFECT OF WIND | 4a |
| POLICE FLAT | 4a |
| D COMPANY N.W.M.P. | 41a |
| WEST FERNIE BEFORE 1908 | 51a |
| COAL CREEK MINES | 51a |
| NATAL-MICHEL | 57a |
| BLAIRMORE | 63a |
| BELLEVUE | 63a |
| SULPHUR SPRINGS AT FRANK | 84a |
| MEETING THE TRAIN AT FRANK | 84a |
| THE GAP | 94a |
| VIEW OF FRANK LOOKING NORTH | 94a |
| FRANK BEFORE THE SLIDE | 134a |
| TURTLE MOUNTAIN BEFORE THE SLIDE | 134a |
| MAIN STREET, FRANK, AFTER 1903 | 142a |
| SITE OF FRANK IN 1951 | 142a |

Coleman, Alberta



Mountains and Coal

Crowsnest Mountain with the surface plant of the International Coal and Coke Co. An infra-red photo used by the National Film Board to symbolise the Crow's Nest Pass. N.F.B. photograph.

A HISTORY OF THE CROW'S NEST PASS

CHAPTER I

THE PASS TODAY

The Crow's Nest Pass is the most southerly of the three passes through the Canadian Rockies which are used by railways and has an altitude higher than the Yellowhead but lower by almost nine hundred feet than the Kicking Horse.¹ It runs at distances varying from twenty-five to forty miles north of the International Boundary. The Crow's Nest railway line is not used for transcontinental traffic but was built to develop the resources of the pass itself and the minerals of the East Kootenay just beyond it. It was many years before the railway was continued through the Kettle Valley to the coast.

The Crow's Nest Pass is the only pass which does not contain a national park and is consequently the route for all heavy truck transport which is not permitted through the parks. Because the communities lie reasonably close together throughout the pass and the Kootenays, the road is kept open at all times. Consequently, the Crow's Nest Pass affords the only road connection between the prairies and the Pacific coast in winter.

1. The altitudes are as follows;
Yellowhead 3729 feet; Crow's Nest 4450 feet;
Kicking Horse 5339 feet.

The pass itself is one of the greatest centres in Canada for the production of coke and steam coal.¹ It has an estimated reserve of over six billion tons of easily obtainable coal and has produced, when the demand has been great enough, over three million tons per year. Each part of the Pass -- the Alberta section and the British Columbia section -- is the leading coal producer in its respective province.

A mining area, the Crow's Nest Pass has a cosmopolitan population and has achieved a reputation as a rough, tough area with considerable drinking and brawling. The Pass transcends provincial limitations, so that residents of Blairmore, Coleman and Fernie consider themselves as inhabitants of the same district. From Calgary and Medicine Hat to Nelson and Trail it is known as "The Pass", as if it were the only pass in the mountains. Beyond these cities it is not so well known, being merely one of three passes through the Rockies. Outsiders often designate it as "The Crow" but that name is usually reserved by the local inhabitants for the little railway divisional point, Crowsnest, which has been a rendezvous for thirsty miners from the time the railway was built.

The communities are all called "towns" or, more rarely, "camps" but only a few of them are actually incorporated. At one time there were over fifteen but now there remain but seven. Except for the city of Fernie, all the towns have a typically mine-town appearance

1. See appendix Table VI. It ranks next to Sydney.

and perhaps this has prevented the Pass from becoming an important tourist centre, although in the early days, the many people who came to fish and hunt described the surrounding country as a paradise.

Supporting between fourteen and sixteen thousand people, the Pass has been an important factor in the development of the Canadian economy. Its lumber is to be found in many homes in southern Alberta and south-eastern British Columbia, its coke is used to smelt practically all the ore of the western province and its coal has driven locomotives from Vancouver to the head of the lakes. Through the Pass has come the wealth of British Columbia and in return vast quantities of prairie farm produce have come to feed the miners and lumbermen of the mountain region.

Less than one mile to the west of the little hamlet of Lundbreck, the character of the countryside changes abruptly from bare, rolling prairie. Stunted lodgepole pine and Douglas fir straggle over the tops of the hills, while long ridges of limestone outcrops not more than a foot or two high run along from north to south, dipping into the earth sharply to the west. These outcrops become larger as one proceeds westward along the highway through the Crow's Nest Pass, so one may consider that the Pass starts at the point where the outcrops commence.

The present highway winds along gravel shelves which are a characteristic of the Alberta side of the Pass; a phenomenon deemed



The Effect of Wind

Lodgepole pines at Burmis in an exposed position. Probably the most photographed trees in the Pass.

Police Flat

The site of the first police post in the Pass. The buildings are all that remain of the surface plant of the Leitch Collieries.



noteworthy by the geological survey in 1885.¹ For a number of miles the road rises sharply as it follows the Crowsnest River after crossing it at Lundbreck Falls. It is obvious that terrific winds must blow in this part of the country, for many of the trees are gnarled and stunted, twisted into bizarre shapes and leaning towards the east. The road shortly descends to a gravel flat upon which are a sawmill of fairly recent origin and a railway station. This is Burmis, the first community listed as having an altitude of over 4,000 feet. (4004). A short distance to the south-east is Lee Lake (or Lees Lake), an important landmark for early travellers.

The general direction of the pass from this point to well into British Columbia is north-westward and as one proceeds in this direction one notes such signs of former coal mining activity as roadbeds of black coal shale from which the tracks have been removed long since. A little farther on, there is a sudden dip into a small almost round valley with a grassy bottom, known as Police Flat from the fact that the post of the Crow's Nest Detachment of the North West Mounted Police was established there shortly after the police arrived at Fort Macleod. Here can be seen deserted coal mine buildings and a row of ruined coke ovens. This was the property of the Leitch Collieries upon which the town of Passburg formerly depended for its existence. Until the depression of the nineteen-thirties, this plant remained as it had been when closed down -- even to a locomotive

1. George M. Dawson, Report of Geological Survey of Canada (Ottawa: King's Printer 1885) p. 66b

rusting in the yard. Passburg, standing on the hill behind, now has but one or two buildings and is scarcely even a ghost town.

A mile or two to the west, signs of real mining activity are apparent. Roads of black shale, well worn, mark the path taken by trucks from the Adanac mine to the south, hauling coal to the tipple in Bellevue for processing. Then the snowsheds and tracks of the Hillcrest-Mohawk Company are seen.

Dozens of shacks and houses, many unpainted and others dingy, mark the beginning of Maple Leaf, formerly the townsite for the Maple Leaf mine but now considered part of Bellevue. The latter place is officially a hamlet in a local improvement district but having a population of over fifteen hundred, it is one of the larger "towns" in the Pass. Bellevue's business section has an "old west" look from its false-fronted stores, many of which are as old as the town itself. Although still not in the Rockies, this is definitely a mountain community, being right on a rocky shelf in the shadow of the peaks. Its altitude is 4092 feet.

To the south across the valley is Hillcrest, or as shown on most maps, Hillcrest Mines. This community now has no mines of its own but most of its men work in those of neighboring towns, transported there by buses. In the valley between this town and Bellevue lies the railway station of Hillcrest, near which passes the road connecting the two places.

To the west of Bellevue lies the first range of the Rockies. Livingstone Range ends some miles to the north but a continuation of it goes southward as a series of more or less disconnected mountains.

known officially as Blairmore Ridge, consisting of Grassy Mountain (at Lille), Bluff or Goat Mountain, Turtle Mountain and Hillcrest Mountain. The passage between Turtle and Bluff Mountains is the lowest and through this run road, railway and river at a point where the width is not greater than a few hundred feet. Between Bellevue and this opening, variously described as the "Gap" or "Gorge" by earlier writers, lies the famous jumble of broken rock known as the Frank Slide. The highway traverses the slide, emerging from it at the present village of Frank, on the north side of the railway. The old town, now vanished, occupied the flat area immediately south of the track. Frank was once the metropolis of the eastern end of the Pass and the railway sheds and roundhouse for the yard engines are still here. Only the railway provides employment within the village. Most of the inhabitants work elsewhere. Turtle Mountain Playgrounds, a modern play area and swimming pool, marks the spot where early westerners foresaw another Bath. The Sanatorium Hotel has vanished and the sulphur springs lie unused across the railway track. Traces of the old smelter may still be seen, but even the bricks of the coke ovens have been taken away for other use. Just north of the railway station may be seen the old railbed of the Frank and Grassy Mountain Railway which connected the former community of Lille with the Canadian Pacific at Frank.

The highway proceeds through the gap and in a distance of less than a mile reaches the town of Blairmore. The valley widens here into a large open area extending to the main range of the Rockies about

twelve or fourteen miles away. This is the Crowsnest Trough. About half way lies a comparatively low range of tree-covered hills running parallel to the mountains, consisting of Willoughby, Ash and McGillivray Ridges and Ma Butte. These are noteworthy because they comprise the Crowsnest volcanics. This upthrust of volcanic rocks through the limestone ranges is unique in western Canada. Blairmore, at an altitude of 4235 feet, is situated in an extremely beautiful spot at the foot of the less precipitous western slopes of Bluff and Turtle Mountains. It has a long main street with all the buildings on one side and the railway on the other. The business places are generally lower than those of the other towns and are mostly of brick. This town has replaced Frank as a centre, for the police barracks, customs office and Reserve Army headquarters are located here.

A little more than a mile west of Blairmore is the new municipal hospital -- an imposing building placed in this isolated position because Coleman and Blairmore could not agree to build in either one of the two towns.

Coleman, the last town before reaching the British Columbia boundary, is about two and a half miles west of the hospital and is 4311 feet above sea level. The river bottom is not as wide here as it is at Blairmore and what flat land there is, is taken up by the surface plant of the International Coal and Coke Company. The business section adjoins this, making Coleman unique in having a mine tipple practically in the heart of town. There is a large bank of coke ovens south of the railway, only a few of which now burn. These are the only coke ovens in operation in Alberta.

Because of the lack of room, the town has spread over a series of gravel terraces, so that many houses appear to be perched precariously on precipices. When the National Film Board wanted a "typical" mining community for a film on the coal industry during the last war, these houses were photographed as "Coaltown", although the "miners" in the picture were Blairmore men. Coleman was less "fortunate" than Blairmore in regard to fires and has the same "old west" look as Bellevue. The last link with the old days of parades and celebrations was removed in 1949 when the balcony of the Coleman Hotel was taken down. Old pictures show many such balconies and this was the last.

About a mile west of Coleman the highway crosses the volcanic ridges and then there are no more coal mining towns until Michel-Natal is reached, eighteen miles away.

North of the highway and a few miles west of Coleman, towers Crow's Nest Mountain -- quite separate from the Rockies. It dominates the Pass towns and is always the bond of union for the Alberta side and until the plate was destroyed by fire in 1904 the Fernie Free Press used a cut of the mountain as its symbol. Gift pictures in the Alberta towns are always of the "Crow" while all other peaks are practically ignored.

Crowsnest Lake, about four miles west of Coleman, is the dividing point of the two different ranges of mountains forming the Rockies. The one to the south forms the Flathead Range, while that to the north is called High Rock Ridge. Between the two is a large

mountain known locally as the Sleeping Giant, but more correctly Mount Phillipps. There are three possible ways through. One of these, Phillipps Pass, was for many years the Crow's Nest Pass but now both road and railway go around Crowsnest Lake so the former trail is known as "the old road over the summit". Even after traversing these passes there were three choices of route, so the Alberta-British Columbia Boundary Commission named the whole group "the Crowsnest series of passes". In the three British Columbia passes roads have been built at one time or another. Ptolemy Pass to the south once had a wagon road leading through the Flathead to the International Boundary, while the original road through the Crow's Nest Pass followed Tent Pass directly to Fernie. The present road follows the railway north-west to Michel and Natal before entering the Elk Valley.

At the eastern end of Crowsnest Lake is the coal-operated emergency plant of the East Kootenay Power Company. Originally intended to work in times of water shortage, it has operated full time since the war. A little farther up the lake is the cave, called the "source of the Old Man River" on an adjacent signboard. It is accessible only from the railroad so is hardly ever seen by visitors. At the western end of the lake is the Summit Lime Works, which supplies much of Alberta's lime products.

A second lake farther west is characterized by a quite noticeable island. Island Lake appears on most old maps, usually with a dot in the centre. This lake and Crowsnest or Glacier Creek, which

empties into it, drain into Crowsnest Lake and hence are in Alberta. The Crow's Nest Pass is unique in the large amount of territory west of the mountains drained by streams flowing eastward.

The little community of Crowsnest, 4450 feet high, at the top of the pass and right on the Alberta-British Columbia boundary, is one hundred miles from Lethbridge and so is a divisional point complete with roundhouse. Everything here depends on the railway and although a few of the buildings are in Alberta, the hamlet is under British Columbia administration.

Beyond Crowsnest the road runs over a rocky shelf to Summit Lake, a small body of water which drains into the Columbia River and the Pacific. The "shelf" in early automobile days was a hazard, for two cars could not pass on it. When Alexander Creek coming in from the north joins the overflow of Summit Lake and both are joined by Michel Creek from the south, a sizeable river is formed. Here the valley becomes so narrow that there is scarcely room for creek and road so that highway building becomes an expensive project. As the road goes down, the railway continues to rise for some miles, forming a loop around Loop Ridge before it meets the road again where Michel Creek comes in from the south. McGillivray Siding is on this loop and is notable as the point at which Corbin coal was brought to the Canadian Pacific down the company's own Eastern British Columbia Railway. From this point, the character of the vegetation changes and more birch and larch (tamarack) trees are to be seen. The

lacy leaves of the larch give a touch of green in spring not seen on the eastern side of the Rockies. The valley continues narrow until it suddenly widens out when Michel Creek flows into the Elk River. The "twin" communities of Michel and Natal are strung out along the length of this narrow way.

Michel, which has an altitude of 3860 feet, is a "company" town consisting of rows of similar houses of the same colour, built according to a unique plan which has been a source of some amusement to other residents of the Pass, because the back sheds of one row of houses have been built right before the front doors of the row behind. Between Michel and Natal is the Michel plant of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, probably the most modern in the country, having the only by-product coke ovens in the west, besides a long row of beehive ovens. Almost under the tipple is dingy Middle Town, consisting of a monotonous row of almost identical "cottages", long unpainted but always occupied as the inhabitants seem quite attached to them.

Natal is an open town and more closely resembles the towns to the east in variety of buildings. The school for both places lies between them but closer to Natal. So closely are the communities associated that the names Natal and Michel are used for both towns indiscriminately by the people of the neighboring towns.

Shortly after leaving Natal, the narrow valley opens into the wide Elk Valley which runs almost directly north and south, nearly at right angles to the Michel-Natal valley. The ranges on the west

side of the Elk mark the Elk River Trough between them and the Rockies, and the range contains many peaks as spectacular as those of the main chain. A road runs north through some ranching country but leads also to the favorite fishing area of the district. On turning south one is surprised by the sight of some very beautiful modern houses in clearings cut in the pines. This is the Sparwood development of the coal company, which is trying to encourage a programme of more permanent building away from the grime and crowding of Michel.

Most of the way down the Elk to Fernie, the road follows the abandoned roadbed of the Great Northern Railway. Along the east side of the valley is a line of fairly low ridges -- Sparwood, Fernie and Morrissey ridges, while on the west side are more distinctive peaks such as Mounts Hosmer and Fernie, as well as Fernie's beloved Trinity Mountain, which is rugged and high.

Hosmer, with an altitude of 3456 feet, is now but a hotel and a house or two. It was once a bustling town and the remains of the mine tipple can be seen back against the hill to the east. A few miles to the southward on a broad flat by the river is the city of Fernie, which has the lowest altitude of any community in the pass -- 3313 feet. Fernie is the most distinctive of all the "towns" in the Crow's Nest Pass. It is the only one that has the appearance of permanence. Its business section consists of solid brick and concrete buildings -- now a little shabby from the trying years of the thirties -- and a paved main street. The tree-planted side streets, clean from the

lack of coal mines in the immediate vicinity, make the city look like a prosperous farming centre. The coal upon which the city depends is found a few miles east, formerly at Coal Creek but now a little closer at the Elk River Colliery. Only the derelict coke ovens not far from the main street betray Fernie's dependence on coal.

As it leaves Fernie, the road again follows the roadbed of the Great Northern. It is rather a scenic highway, being carved from the rocky wall and passing through a tunnel on the way. The valley narrows again to a "gap" from which one emerges into a large open area near Elko. The Pass has obviously ended. Formerly the road was on the east bank of the river, ascending, near the abandoned town of Morrissey, a steep hill, which was a legend in the early days of automobile travel. The coal measures end near Morrissey so that the pass and the coal end together. Hence coal and the Crow's Nest Pass are synonymous.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXTENT OF THE PASS. ITS GEOLOGY AND CLIMATE

Almost every person writing about the Crow's Nest Pass has set different limits to it, varying from a large but vaguely defined area to the one just described. Captain Thomas Blakiston mentioned seeing a trail coming down from the pass at a point probably between Cowley and Lundbreck and stated, "We know only that its eastern entrance is on the river of the same name, while it emerges in the vicinity of the 'Steeple's' or Mount Deception."¹

The writer has been unable to locate Mount Deception² but The Steeple's is a rocky range somewhat like Fernie's Lizard Mountains, situated about half-way between Fernie and Cranbrook in direct line, some miles north of the present community of Bull River where the Bull River joins the Kootenay. This is over thirty miles beyond the present limits. Blakiston helped to define the pass because when he crossed the North Kootenay Pass he emerged at a point near Elko, so it may be assumed that the two passes meet there and hence mutually terminate each other.

George M. Dawson, conducting the first geological survey in 1883, considered that the "Crow Nest Pass may be said to terminate

1. Thomas Blakiston; Further Papers p. 60; included in the Report of the Palliser Expedition.
2. A map accompanying A. Stavely Hill's From Home to Home (London: Sampson Low, 1885) shows Mount Deception to be in a range midway between the Elk and Kootenay Rivers about 15 miles south of 50° N. Latitude and far from the Crow's Nest Pass.

at the bridge (over the Elk River) where the description of the North Kootanie Pass also ends."¹

Other writers have not been nearly so definite. One writer extended the pass to Wild Horse Creek.² The ranchers of the Pincher Creek-Macleod area were equally careless. Any area in the mountains in the general direction of the pass was called the Crow's Nest Pass in most newspaper reports. However, the tendency today is to limit the pass to the Cretaceous coal-bearing area which starts near Lundbreck, Alberta, and ends just beyond Morrissey, British Columbia.

The two troughs, the Elk and Crowsnest, contain mostly Cretaceous rocks. The coal is found in the Kootenay formation. The coal formation is overlain by the barren Blairmore strata and underlain by the Fernie soft marine shales. The deposits in British Columbia were formerly part of the Lower Cretaceous basin of sedimentation and "were uplifted and eroded, becoming separated from the inner foothills belt of Alberta by an intervening belt of limestone. On the Alberta side of the Crow's Nest area the measures consist of a series of westerly dipping fault blocks on a north-south strike."³ The Crowsnest Volcanics are of great geological

1. Dawson; op. cit. p. 78b.

2. Geo. H. Johnson, paper, in files of Calgary Historical Society, Public Library, Calgary.

3. Ignatieff, A. et al Conditions and Occurrences in the Canadian Coal Mining Industry, Canadian Mining Journal, (Ottawa, 1951) vol. 72, October 1951.

interest and several brochures have been written by Canadian geologists upon the subject. One of the types of rock found there has been named Blaimorite.¹

Dawson noted a curious phenomenon. He stated that he believed that there was a great fault near the volcanic ridges and that the surface sandstone rocks between them and the main range of the Rockies were lower strata than the coal-bearing rocks and he forecast that no coal would be found in the area. This was borne out by later developments and has had the effect of dividing the Crow's Nest Pass into two parts, -- the Alberta coal-mining district and the Fernie-Michel-Corbin coal basin, with a gap of about eighteen miles between. The coal formations reappear just west of the main range and some of the coal on the Alberta side of the border is now being strip-mined but there is no community, except the little railway hamlet of Crowsnest, between Coleman and Michel. The only gold mine noted in the Crow's Nest Pass was discovered in the coalless area and although Henry Kountz' gold-platinum mine came to nought, it lends some credence to the legend of the Lost Lemon Mine, which would likely be found in a similar formation some distance to the north.²

The coal seams in the eastern zones are broken so that they appear as outcrops with the coal pitching to the west with varying degrees of slope. In the western zone the coal is found near the bases

1. Museum Bulletin 4 No. 1459-1914. Geological Survey, Department of Mines, Ottawa. 1914.

2. Robert E. Gard, Johnny Chinook (New York: Longman's, 1945) recounts this legend.

of plateau-like mountains and may be said to have no well defined pitch, although some seams have faulted a great deal, as at Corbin where they appear to be standing on end.

The two factors of altitude and varying degrees of mountain protection produce a somewhat different type of climate from that of the prairies, while the main range of the Rockies causes different weather on the eastern slopes from that on the western side. Blakiston, approaching the mountains west of Pincher Creek in 1858, noted that "in the middle of the afternoon it blew a fresh breeze ... with usually some cumuli over the mountains which disappear before reaching the plains."¹ This is still a familiar feature of the eastern slopes. The mountains are often swathed in clouds for days, while the prairies east of Burmis lie in bright sunlight. These cloud formations often cause light rain to fall even in the depths of winter, especially during Chinooks. Frequently, squalls of blizzard ferocity blot out the land for periods of fifteen or twenty minutes at a time even during late spring and early summer.

Perhaps more notable than cloud formations are the terrific winds that blow through the eastern part of the pass. Although the effect of the winds is frequently noted as far west as Natal, there is normally little wind west of Crowsnest. The winds seem to blow downwards from over the Rockies and gain great speed. They do relatively little damage to buildings, perhaps because they are blowing

1. Blakiston, op.cit. Appendix II p. 67.

downwards, although Father Lajat's first church in Frank was blown off its lofty position on a hilltop. The winds continue eastward as the famous prairie Chinooks, which are somewhat less gusty. Certain points along the road are noted for their wind. The road near Police Flat, the outskirts of Bellevue and a point in the Frank slide are notable. Coleman's windy "bluff" is a local tradition, while the wind at the turn in the road under Mount Sentry along Crowsnest Lake will rock an automobile. This latter spot is the point where most of the blocking of the road leading to British Columbia takes place when snow begins to drift. Almost all travellers in the area mention the wind. In 1886, John R. Craig came upon some prospectors who were travelling westward to the Kootenays. Their covered wagon had been blown off the trail and only some trees had prevented it from rolling down a steep hill at a point near the present town of Blairmore.¹

There is only one wind besides the west wind and that is from the east. North and south winds are unknown. Quite the opposite of the Chinook, the east wind is usually light, except where it funnels between Bluff and Turtle Mountains at Blairmore, but even here it has little resemblance to a prairie "norther". Lacking proper meteorological equipment, the residents have no really accurate picture of their weather, but by comparing radio reports from Calgary and Lethbridge over the last few years with local weather, it would appear

1. John R. Craig. An Excursion into the Crow's Nest Pass, included in his book, Ranching with Lords and Commons. (Toronto: Briggs, 1903) p. 269.

that the mountain winters are milder, for the Chinooks come sooner and last longer even though the temperatures during cold snaps may be somewhat lower. In summer, however, the reverse is true, for the altitude keeps the temperature down especially at night so that frosts may occur in any month of the year. This accounts for the lack of any but sub-marginal farming in the eastern part of the pass. From Bellevue east there is less frost and there are a few farms, but these lean heavily to cattle raising. Rainfall seems to be a little less than on the neighboring plains but winter snowfall appears to be heavier.

The climate on the western side is more characteristically British Columbian. The Elk Valley is noted for the depth of its snowfall but owing to the lack of a violent west wind it does not pile into the rock-hard mountainous drifts of the eastern slopes, nor does it melt to any extent in winter. Michel seems to be much like the eastern side, with greater precipitation. In early spring the road from Natal east may be clear of snow while cars may have to bounce through rutted, hardpacked snow westward to Fernie and beyond. Most of Fernie's "weather" sweeps down the Elk Valley with blizzard-like force but the temperature does not go quite as low as on the Alberta side. In summer, with a lower altitude and greater rainfall, the Elk Valley is much more suited to farming. Spring may come a little later because of the lack of the Chinook but it comes along faster and perennials and shrubs bloom a week or two ahead of those on the Alberta side. Fernie is definitely the "flower garden" of the pass.

In 1883, Dawson noted a decided difference in the lushness of the vegetation as he descended the western side of the divide. This is still true but there have been frequent periods of drought that have resulted in many disastrous forest fires. Just as frequently there have been periods of mountainous snows or sudden floods.

CHAPTER 3

PLACE NAMES

Few districts in Canada can engender the same heated discussion over place names and their origins as this mountain area. Names have often been chosen and fixed by surveyors from Ottawa with little consideration for local names, and as these names were buried in maps not readily available to the general public, the old names and spellings tend to persist. Further, different maps from Ottawa frequently carry different names for the same place. As an example, the mountain, known locally as the "Sleeping Giant", (from a fancied profile of a person in repose) was originally called Mount Wilson, and although the British Columbia-Alberta Boundary Commission decided to call it Mount Phillipps, the name Mount Tecumseh appears on their maps as the name had not been changed in time.

The name of the pass for this work has been chosen as "Crow's Nest Pass" in spite of the fact that the Canadian Board on Geographical Names insists on the form "Crowsnest" in all connections. But, popular usage, as much national as local, decrees that this cannot be. It may be Crowsnest, B.C.; the Crowsnest River; Pincher Creek-Crowsnest constituency or Crowsnest Ridge but the pass itself is always Crow's Nest Pass. There is the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, Crow's Nest Pass Railway and Crow's Nest Pass freight rates. The abbreviation is always C.N.P. and the innumerable leagues and

organizations always use the name Crow's Nest Pass as their designation of locality. Therefore, although Crows' Nest Pass might be grammatically more correct and Crowsnest Pass legally more correct, the name must be Crow's Nest Pass, for the people will spell it no other way.

Earlier writers have had other variations. Blakiston in 1858 called it Crow Nest Pass, Crow nest Pass and Crow nest River. In the same volume Palliser has Crow River and Lodge des Corbeaux.¹ Dawson called it Crow Nest Pass,² while Hill in 1881 called the mountain Crow's Nest Hill.³ The same man called the river the Old Man coming down from the Crow's Nest Pass. As a matter of fact, for years and still to some extent locally the Crowsnest river was called the Old Man or the Middle Fork of the Old Man or just Middle Fork, while the present Oldman was the North Fork and once the Belly River. This confusion is reflected in Place-Names of Alberta⁴ which agrees that the northern branch is the main stream of the Oldman River, as the area around the source of this river is known as the Old Man's Playing Ground by the Indians. "Hence" concludes the author, "the cave from which the stream emerges is known as the Old Man's Cave" -- but the only cave is the one on Crowsnest Ridge from which the Crowsnest River flows.

1. From maps accompanying the Palliser Report.

2. Dawson op.cit. p. 64b.

3. Alexander Stavely Hill; op.cit. p. 37.

4. Geographic Board of Canada (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1928) pamphlet.

More contentious still are two other points. What is the origin of the name and which is the original Crow's Nest Mountain?

The early ranchers of the Pincher Creek district vouch for various versions of a story which appeared in an article in McLean's Magazine in the issue of June 1, 1928. It states that some time about 1852 or 1854, a party of Blackfoot Indians managed to cut off a group of raiding Crow Indians who tried to escape westward through the pass in question. They were cornered and slaughtered at the base of a mountain which was called Crow's Nest in memory of the occasion. The article precipitated quite a dispute, culminating in a letter from R. Douglas, secretary of the Geographic Board of Canada, enclosing a statement on the origin of the name by James White published in the Lethbridge Herald July 12, 1928. White quoted Palliser and Blakiston as using a name which was quite current before 1858 and further stated that the Rev. John McDougall, the missionary to the Stoney Indians, had said in November, 1909, that the name came from a crows' nest beside the trail. Most of the arguments used in the article could be disputed but the following (point number seven in the letter) seems to be particularly reasonable:

" The Handbook of North American Indians published by the Bureau of American Ethnology, states that the Blackfoot name for the Crow Indians is 'I-sa-poa'. Crow (the bird) in Blackfoot is 'Mih-sto'. No one could mistake a reference by a Blackfoot Indian to the 'nest' of 'I-sa-poa' for the reference to the nest of a 'Mih-sto'." (1)

1. This does not deny the occurrence of the battle but merely implies that the pun was obviously possible in the English language only.

The Blood Indian name for the mountain is "Ma-sto-eeas" and the similarity to the Blackfoot word is obvious. Several fanciful accounts of Indian legends have been published in the press referring to love and Indian maidens but these sound too much like the romantic ideas of the white man.

The same article from McLean's Magazine also states that the Indian Crow's Nest Mountain was in reality Turtle Mountain. In disputing this statement, James White told of a statement made by R. N. Wilson, who had been an agent on the Blood reserve for many years. Wilson was speaking in 1918 of a time twenty-two years before when Chief Ermine Horses of Blackfoot-Old-Woman led him to a "crow's nest" which turned out to be a

"...high isolated and prominent hill standing between the Porcupines and the Rockies, and some few miles north and east of the eastern entrance to the Crow's Nest Pass. He said 'This is what the Indians called the Crow's Nest' (literally speaking the raven's home). When asked about the present Crow's Nest he said 'That perhaps is the white man's talk. We Indians know but one Crow's Nest and this is it.'" (1)

Wilson further stated that this hill was known locally as Antelope Butte and is so named on some government maps. This might explain why Hill referred to it as Crow's Nest Hill (page 22 above) in 1881.

On the other hand those who named Turtle Mountain as the peak in question are just as strong in their argument. F. W. Godsall²

1. The article referred to (Lethbridge Herald July 11, 1928) deals further with this conversation.
2. Letter by F. W. Godsall, Calgary Historical Society files, dated April 2, 1924.

tells of talking with two Indians who said, "It was under that mountain (Turtle) we killed the Crows (Indians), that¹ is what we call Crow's Nest Mountain." "These men", says Godsall, "claimed actually to have taken part in the fight themselves." Godsall adds that W. S. Lee was a witness to this conversation and that the Frank Slide now covers the spot. It might be opportune to mention that Turtle Mountain was not named by the Indians, who had no word for "turtle", but probably, as Godsall suggests, by Louis O. Garnett, whose ranch was near Lee's ranch where the Crowsnest and Oldman Rivers join.

From the foregoing it can readily be seen that no definite conclusion may be reached about either the site or the origin of the name Crow's Nest Pass and mountain, for after all if it is so obviously named after an actual nest, why did Dr. Hector² place "Lodge des Corbeaux" instead of "Nid des Corbeaux" on one of the maps in the Palliser Report?³ -- and further, if the site were a mere hill, why should he have starred on the same map "The Crow's Nest" so plainly as a large peak standing out from the main range of the Rockies?⁴

1. The quotation was punctuated as written.
2. Apparently the only copy of the Palliser Report in Southern Alberta is the one in the Palliser Hotel in Calgary.
3. Blakiston, from a point southwest of Pincher Creek, described Crow's Nest Mountain as seen from that point. However, he did not recognize it, for he concluded from its perfect dome shape that it was Gould's Dome -- a peak twenty-five miles farther north which is invisible from this place. (This was checked carefully by the writer.)
4. Some Peigans were queried recently on the above naming of Crow's Nest Mountain but they knew less about it than the questioner did. They showed little interest in their own lore.

CHAPTER 4

THE DISCOVERY OF THE PASS

There is one claim to discovery about which controversy has raged and because it has been widely publicized by press and radio and stated in books intended for use in Alberta schools, it is necessary to discuss it here.

In August 1941 there appeared in the Lethbridge Herald an article by Freda Graham Bundy, entitled "A Link With The Past", which told of the discovery of a small lead plaque with the following inscription on it.

ANNO XXVI REGNI LUDOVICI XV PROREGE ILLUSTRISSIMO
DOMINO, DOMINO MARCHIONE DE BEAUHARNOIS MDCCXXXI.
PETRO GAULTIER DE LAVERENDRIE POSUIT.

On the reverse face was a roughly scratched message --

Pose par le chevalyer de Lav
to St. Louy la Londette, A. Miotte
le 30 de Mars 1743

Mrs. Bundy had purchased a box containing odds and ends at an auction sale at Drewry's Glen Ranch on Todd Creek, near the mouth of the Crow's Nest Pass. This box lay unused and neglected until 1935 when quite by accident the plaque was discovered in it. Mr. Drewry was dead by this time but his brother thought that the lead plate might have been dug up with some other relics when the basement of the house was excavated about 1915. This spot had always been a favorite camping site for Indians as artifacts had been turned up there several

1. The spelling appears as "Tod" and "Todd" on different maps.

times before and since. Mrs. Bundy brought her plaque personally to the Public Archives of Canada, but had heard nothing further from them, although some readers of the 1941 article had written to the press to say that they had similar plaques which were souvenirs.

The present writer decided to follow up the story. The original La Vérendrye plaque was discovered at Fort Pierre, South Dakota, in 1913, and from his own journal it would appear that La Vérendrye placed only one plaque and that in the area near Fort Pierre. The Public Archives sent the writer photographs of both the Drewry and Fort Pierre plaques, while a rubbing was obtained from a known replica left by the late Judge Howay to the Library of the University of British Columbia. The Howay plaque had printed upon it;

Columbia River Historical Expedition
July 1926
Compliments of the Great Northern Railway

The Drewry plaque had no such inscription.

Inquiry at the Great Northern Railway public relations office revealed that they were reasonably certain that the inscription was put on all plaques that they issued. Dr. William Kaye Lamb, the Dominion Archivist, who has shown considerable interest in the discovery, found that replicas were also struck in 1925 in connection with the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition. It was his surmise that the plaques were made in two series -- one with and one without the Great Northern stamp. Dr. Lamb compared the rubbing of the replica with the

Drewry plaque and arrived at the following conclusions:¹

- "(1) The back of the two plates are absolutely identical so far as the ordinary eye can see.
- (2) The inscriptions on the front are likewise identical but in order to leave room for the Great Northern Railway inscription, the railway company placed the whole inscription slightly higher up on the plaque."

In a later letter² Dr. Lamb concludes, ". . . I have hunted up an early description of the original plaque and I find that it measured $8\frac{1}{2}$ by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches. If the Alberta plaque ($3\frac{1}{4}$ by $2\frac{1}{2}$) is genuine, we must assume therefore, that La Vérendrye not only duplicated his rough inscription with uncanny accuracy, but accomplished this feat while at the same time greatly reducing the scale of the copy. This seems to me a most improbable feat and makes it all the more certain that all the small plaques are merely modern copies."

If the plaque had proved to be an original, it would have been a fine starting point for this chapter, but it does not seem to be so. Also, much to the chagrin of the citizens of the Crow's Nest Pass, it became evident that early travellers had little regard for the pass which became so important later. However, an easy passage free from obstructions was of more importance to men who travelled on horseback or on foot than mere low altitude, which only became of prime importance in the days of railway construction.

1. Letter from Dr. Lamb November 16, 1949.
2. Letter from Dr. Lamb November 23, 1949.

The first white man to come near the Pass, of whom there is any record, was Father Jean de Smet. In 1845 de Smet was a missionary among the Kootenay Indians in the Tobacco Plains section of southern British Columbia and northern Montana. He travelled extensively in the area around his mission and in 1845 made his epic journey to Rocky Mountain House to persuade the Blackfoot to make peace with the Kootenays, who were in a state of great fear after numerous clashes. It has been stated that de Smet chose the western end of the Crow's Nest Pass for the first part of the trip, but since it has been established almost certainly that he went through White Man Pass,¹ this is scarcely likely. However, there is other evidence that he visited the valley of the Elk several times. In a letter² he said, "The fine river Des Chutes comes roaring down and crosses the plain before it joins its waters to the McGillivray (Kootenay)³ ... and having remarked large pieces of coal along the river, I am convinced that this fossil could be abundantly procured." He is obviously referring to the Elk River, the only one noted for coal in those parts. Hence, de Smet was both the first known traveller in the Pass and the discoverer of its coal.

The Palliser expedition in 1858 first gave recognition to the Crow's Nest Pass by that name. Lieutenant, later Captain, Thomas

1. Dawson op.cit. 1885. See footnote on White Man Pass section where Dawson discusses this. p. 112b.
2. Chittenden and Richardson; The Life and Travels of Pierre Jean de Smet (New York: Francis Harper, 1905)
3. ibid. p. 959 "...the large river called indifferently the Kootenie, the McGillivray and the Flatbow."

Blakiston had been charged with exploring "Kootonay" Pass to see if it lay in British territory. Blakiston, after a dispute with Palliser, went off from the main party, and his account appears in the section of the Palliser Report known as "Further Papers". He listed the pass as a known pass at 49 degrees 40 minutes North Latitude and called it the "Crow Nest Pass". The (North) "Kootonay" was given as 49 degrees 34 minutes. Travelling southwards between the Livingstone Range and the Porcupines, which was considered safer because of the danger of Indian raids, he passed across the mouth of the Crow's Nest Pass. Referring to this pass his report states, "of the first of these (passes) we know only that its eastern entrance is on the river of the same name, while it emerges in the vicinity of the "Steeple" or "Mount Deception"¹. Further on we read, "By report of the natives it is a very bad road and seldom used." There was, however, a well defined path when he crossed it in August and he " ... observed the old trail coming in from the plaines (sic) on the left bank of the Crow-nest River." It would be interesting to know which of the Crow's Nest series of passes was followed by the Indians, who were almost all Flatheads or Kootenays and who would have turned south as soon as possible to reach the Tobacco Plains. When Michael Phillipps came through about fifteen years later there was no sign of a trail along the route now travelled by the road and railway.

1. Palliser Report. Further Papers p. 60.

Michael Phillipps is, by all available evidence, the first white man to traverse the Crow's Nest Pass.¹ He had been a factor in the Hudson's Bay Company posts in Montana and Idaho and when all posts in the western part of the United States were sold, Phillipps' post at Tobacco Plains was among them. Being free for a time he decided to go northward to do some prospecting. In 1873, in company with John Collins, a trapper, he started north up the Elk Valley. No fire had then swept the valley and although there were no trails the going was comparatively easy. They camped a few days at the place where Fernie was later built, then moved north and rediscovered an old camping site near some hotsprings where Michel Creek comes into the Elk. Phillipps stated that he had been there with Peter Boyle in the 1860's. They saw many of the elk to which the valley owes its name. They decided to follow up Michel Creek and, after travelling through heavy timber for several days, found large trails which were certainly not elk trails passing out towards "the lake". Phillipps writes, "We found trees covered with Buffalo hair and it was evident to both of us that we had passed through the Rocky Mountains without going over any range. This is the first trip ever made by what is now known as the Crow's Nest Pass." Phillipps realized the importance of a pass with no mountain to go over, so he decided to work for a trail.

1. Michael Phillipps; Memories of Thirty Years Ago, published in a special edition of the Fernie Free Press in 1905. All of the following narrative is from this account. There are few of these books left since the fire of 1908 but Mr. Wallace of Fernie, formerly of the Free Press, has one.

His account is somewhat vague for he gives no details of the route he took or to what lake he was referring or why it took several days to go not more than ten miles or even how the hotsprings became moved about twenty-five miles to the south. Neither does he mention meeting any white settlers in the area. Mr. W. S. Lees was already settled by the lake which bears his name and he claimed that in the same year (1873) he travelled from his ranch up to where Frank stands today and discovered the sulphur springs there. He said that it was the year before the police came to the country.¹

In the summer of 1874 Phillipps returned with "Woods, William Saunders and Jim Morrissey (a miner)."² They found and named Morrissey Creek and took out some coal. They named the next large stream Coal Creek. Phillipps continues, "We could find nothing but coal and coal everywhere." Next they named Lizard Creek from some green "lizards" they found there. Jim Morrissey complained bitterly about finding only coal, but it was not until they went up the Bull River two years later that they found anything else. They were more taken by the iron and gold they found here than by the vast coal deposits of the Elk Valley.

Phillipps was able to persuade the British Columbia government to grant him a small sum to define the trail. According to Phillipps,

1. Macleod Gazette, November 1, 1888. Account by Editor C. E. D. Wood of a trip into the Crow's Nest Pass. The police arrived in 1874.
2. Phillipps op. cit. (no page numbers)

Gold Commissioner William Fernie opposed this plan, saying, "The Indians say there was no such pass and there is no use wasting the money." However, Phillipps and a Mr. Ridgeway blazed the path through and the trail was made.

There is a rather curious fact here which needs explaining. Phillipps' narrative describes the route now traversed by the railway and one would conclude that the trail went that way. Yet in 1883, Dawson followed the well-defined road which went directly from Island Lake through Tent Mountain Pass and southwestward to Coal Creek and then into the Elk Valley.¹ He mentions no other trail, yet Phillipps' account does not seem to have been challenged in 1905 by men who were perfectly aware of this.²

In speaking of the Dewdney Trail (the Hope-Princeton-Wild Horse Creek trail) Gibbon says, "Peter Fernie continued the trail westward from the Kootenay River through the Crow's Nest Pass in 1879."³ Perhaps this might have taken a somewhat different route.

In the same article Phillipps tells of sending Dr. Dawson a sample of coal and a rough pen sketch of the Elk River, using his own names. This probably explains why local names and government names are more in accord on the west side of the Pass.

1. See p. 35 below for G. M. Dawson's account.
2. W. R. A. Wallace of Fernie spoke in 1949 about walking to Bullhead or Bull's Head (Crowsnest) by this route. See map.
3. J. M. Gibbon; Steel of Empire (Indianapolis: Bobbs, Merrill, 1935) p. 340.

Once the Pass had been opened, it was soon one of the main connections between the Kootenays and the plains and became one of the most used summer trails in the country, with horses and cattle from as far as Kamloops being driven through it. It became a matter of intense interest to the ranchers of the Pincher Creek and Macleod district and is mentioned quite frequently in the early newspapers.

The stories of the Lost Lemon Mine refer to large gangs of prospectors meeting at Crowsnest Lake and going northward in their search for the lost lode very shortly after 1873 although the dates are rather vague.¹

In 1881, the Canadian Pacific Railway made an exploratory survey of the Crow's Nest Pass but the Canadian government, "for military reasons", opposed any main line so near the International Boundary.² In the same year, Alexander Stavely Hill went through Garnett's ranch to the mouth of the Pass and tells of a settler who had tried ranching well up into the valley but now had settled near the mouth of it. In 1882, John Craig³ went from the Oxley ranch at Granum on a quick dash up into the Pass but mentions no settlers at all.

Stavely Hill was unable to find a police post that he thought was at Police Flat in 1881⁴, which suggests that a temporary station might have been placed there about that time. In 1883, because of the

1. Gard; op.cit. Senator Riley's account is referred to.
2. Gibbon; op.cit. p. 341.
3. Craig; op.cit. p. 55.
4. A. Stavely Hill; op. cit. p. 223.

increase in cattle rustling through the Pass, a permanent post was established with two men in charge. Fairly substantial log buildings were erected there in 1887 and the following year the mud roofs were replaced by shingles.¹ Although referred to as the Crow's Nest Detachment at "The Gap",² it was actually in the little valley now called Police Flat in which now lie the derelict coke ovens of Passburg.

In 1882, George Dawson made his first visit to the area and explored up to the entrance of the pass, discovering two coal seams of three feet and three feet six inches in the river bank a few miles below the falls (Lundbreck) on the Middle Fork. He was more excited about the prospect of going up into the pass the following year.

"The most interesting feature of the explorations was the discovery that in the region of the Crow's Nest Pass wide valleys based on Cretaceous rock occur west of the first range which is formed of Paleozoic limestone and that in the Cretaceous rock an important intercalation of volcanic material appears in which traces at least of copper ores occur. It is possible that in some of the now isolated troughs of Cretaceous rocks coal beds may yet be found in the heart of the range. The existence of a seam was indeed reported about twenty miles west of the summit of the Crow's Nest Pass, but the locality has not yet been examined." (3)

1. Turner, J. P. The North West Mounted Police (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950) vol. 2, p. 22.
2. ibid. vol. 2, p. 340 and p. 403.
3. G. M. Dawson; Preliminary Report of the Geological Survey. Department of Mines, Ottawa, 1882, p. 3b.

In 1883 he changed the name to Crow Nest Pass, when he entered it for a minute geological examination. The area was well travelled and a practicable trail had been cut out and bridges built over several of the larger streams by the government of British Columbia.¹ He commented on the number of horses and cattle driven eastward over the road. He stated that the road in his day did not correspond to any known Indian trail. The Indians still preferred the North "Kootanie" Pass because it was more direct. The map accompanying the report shows the pass with two summits going from Island Lake across Michel and Marten Creeks to Coal Creek and into the Elk Valley where Fernie is today.

The passage between Turtle and Bluff Mountains he called "The Gap", a name which now is used for the opening in the Livingstone Range where the Oldman (North Fork) flows.

Although there were some signs of forest fires even that early, most of the hills were covered with thick forest. He was interested in determining how far north the Crow's Nest Trough extended but found the forest so thick that he was forced to return after covering only a few miles and injuring one of his horses. When a highway was built north of Coleman along this route in 1949, the area had been both burned and logged over and the small pines of from fifteen to twenty feet high that barred the way were easily removed by bulldozers.

1. See above p. 33 in the reference to the Dewdney Trail.

Dawson found the valley quite attractive and suggested that the name was taken from the Cree "Kah-ka-¹ioo-wut-tshis-tun". He evidently considered that Blairmore Ridge was part of the Livingstone Range and from his description it would appear that the first coal found in the eastern end of the pass was near Blairmore -- just inside the Gap. He found seams about two feet thick and good coking quality but rather high in ash (22.41%).² West of the main range he explored to the south into Ptolemy Pass and discovered the glacier which is the source of Crowsnest Creek, known locally as Glacier Creek. He noted that this pass led into the Flathead country.

There is some disagreement among the residents of the Pass as to how the original road got around the barrier of Crowsnest Lake. Did it follow the route now taken by the railway or did it go through Phillipps Pass or, as the local inhabitants say, "over the summit"? According to Dawson,³ "the old trail, turning to the north at the east or lower end of the (Crowsnest) lake ran westward nearly parallel to it in a narrow dry valley. A better track has lately however been found along the north shore of the lake itself." He also describes "a remarkable spring which may be designated as the source of the Middle Branch or Crow Nest River." This is the first recorded mention of "The Cave", from which still gushes a large stream of ice cold water.

1. Dawson; op. cit. 1885. The "Kah-ka" suggests a bird rather than a tribe of Indians. p. 60b.
2. ibid. p. 64b -- not unusual in outcrop coal.
3. ibid. p. 70b.

Dawson was not impressed by the western side of the Pass, which he called "extremely desolate, the forests... having been almost completely destroyed by repeated fires which have swept the region since the Crow Nest Pass became a travelled route." This had happened in a space of less than ten years.

The valley of Coal Creek is described as monotonous and plateau-like in outline. He believed that the coal-bearing horizon here was the same as that east of the volcanic ranges. He named the Lizard Mountains from the creek which came down from them.

Dawson was not the only notable visitor to the Pass in 1883. Mr. George Hope Johnson, later of Calgary, tells of making the trip with the Hon. F. W. Aylmer. Johnson wrote:¹ "Where there are now thousands of men from Michel down the Elk River, up the Kootenay and down the Columbia to Golden, there were in the winter of 1883-1884 about twenty-five white men and three white women mostly farther down around Wild Horse Creek."

In 1886 John R. Craig of the Oxley Ranch made an "excursion"² into the Crow's Nest Pass, accompanied by his wife, sons and daughters. These are the first white women of whom there is any record entering the Pass. Craig wrote a description of the country hoping that some day it might have some historical value. This account is more interesting to

1. Paper, Calgary Historical Association 1925.
2. Craig published an account of this trip in his book cited above.

the modern resident than that of Dawson because it is less concerned with geology and more with the notable surface features. Craig considered that civilization ended at the ranch of John Lees (others say Lee) but up at the sulphur springs he found a pioneer in a log cabin who proposed to build a sanatorium there.¹ The visiting rancher called Bluff Mountain "The Lion", and described the Gap as a narrow gorge. He noted that the road was "incredibly bad", needing six fordings of the "Old Man River" from the springs to the lake. Vehicles could go no farther than Crowsnest Lake, the balance being but a rough trail. Even though this trail was precipitous, it was "comparatively a very good trail to what it was before being improved through government aid." The area was densely forested and a game paradise, while fish were abundant. They encountered a party of Stoney who apparently hunted regularly in the district, but were appalled by the destruction by the Indians of more game than they could possibly use.

A similar account by the editor of the Macleod Gazette² ran as a serial feature in 1888 and added a few points of interest. He noted two trails from Pincher Creek to Lee's "ranche". One went via the falls on the "Middle Fork of the Old Man's River", while the other passed the ranch of the Garnett brothers and was a better trail. By this time, the ranchers of the Pincher Creek district had made use of the narrow gap between the present communities of Frank and

1. Craig; op. cit. p. 263.

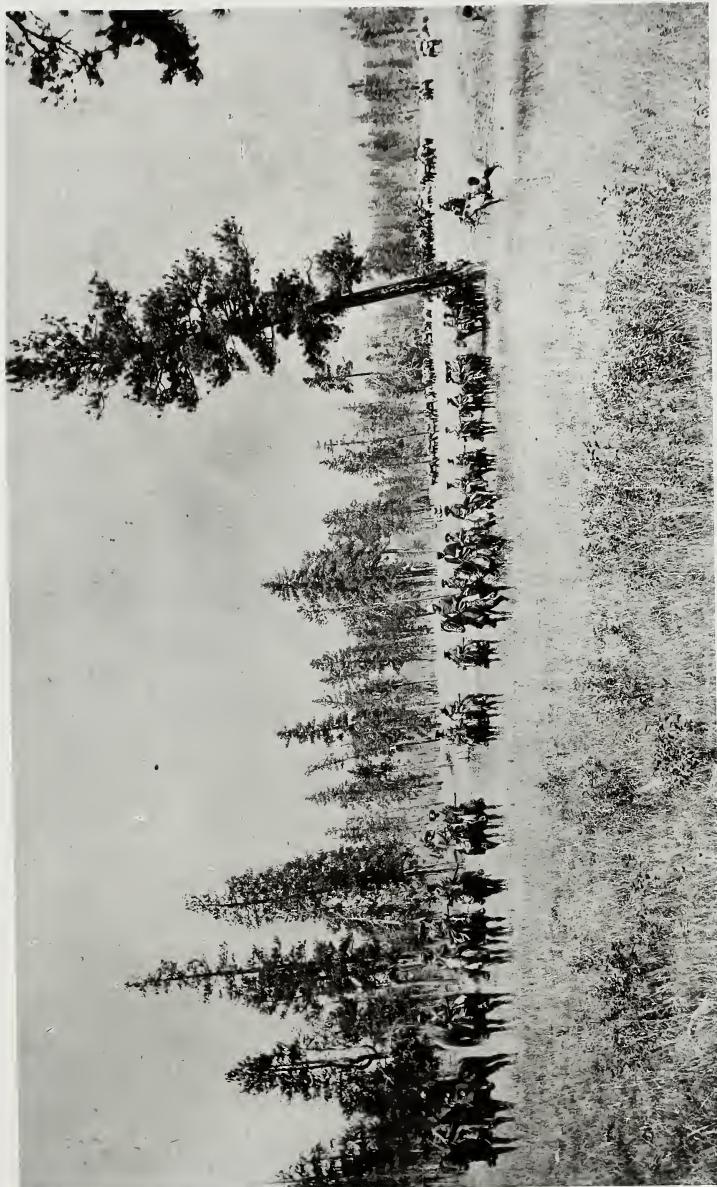
2. Macleod Gazette, November 1, 1888. C. E. D. Wood, Editor.

Blairmore and by means of several spans of wire they impounded the bulls of the area in the lush grasslands to the west during the time of the year when breeding would have caused calves to be born in winter.¹ Mr. Lee at his own expense had improved the road to the springs, while the ranch itself showed much building and was already a "guest" ranch. As for the sulphur springs, they were colder than those of Banff but were "stronger and effected more rapid cures", including one on Mr. Lee himself. Thomas Watson was then in charge. There were large deposits of sulphur² along the stream and this was used to strengthen the water when it was heated in cauldrons for the treatment of patients.

The trail stayed in the valley for five or six miles until Rocky Point was reached (probably about a mile west of Coleman on the volcanic ridge) and then it was a mere pack trail over a succession of steep grades until it was a thousand feet above the river. The editor noted that the "wagon road" ended at the lake.

It was earlier in this same year that the worth of the Pass as a means of travelling with a large group from British Columbia to the plains was established. "D" Division of the North West Mounted

1. Another gate in Phillipps Pass blocked the western entrance, which probably accounts for the name Bull Head or Bull's Head given to that place during construction days. The gate was still there in 1901.
2. There is no such deposit today.



D Company N.W.M.P.

Ready for the march out of Kootenay via

the Crows Nest Pass 1888 R.C.M.P. photo

Police made its famous "March Out of Kootenay"¹ to prove that the Crow's Nest Pass was the best route to move troops. This group had been stationed at Kootenai (Fort Steele) and were to have made their trip in July, but delayed until the settlement of the trouble which had flared up between the Flatheads and the American government.

The trail was cleared and caches laid over the summit as far as sixteen miles east of the lower lake. This was probably as far as the Crow's Nest Detachment post at Police Flat. Constables Waite and Eales were dispatched over the mountains to request that wagons be sent from Fort Macleod to "Old Man's Lake" in the Crow's Nest Pass. The troop, sixty strong, under Superintendent S. Steele and Inspectors Wood and Huot, was soon on its way. They went up the Elk as far as "Ferney's" (Coal) Creek, where they noted a cabin, and a little farther on they passed Colonel Baker's coal claim on Marten Creek. These were the only inhabited spots until they reached the springs. They continued until they reached the Crow's Nest Detachment post and then stopped there and at Lee's ranch and later continued to Fort Macleod. The Macleod Gazette announced, on August 23, that the troop had passed through the mountains in eleven days without incident. Mrs. Wood, who was to have accompanied her husband, turned back and went out via Golden and the Canadian Pacific

1. Report of Commissioner of N. W. M. P. (Ottawa: King's Printer 1888) p. 84.

Railway, arriving in Macleod from Calgary by wagon.¹

Inspector Wood was enthusiastic -- "...there is the pass and the richest country on the face of the earth awaiting development."² Superintendent Steele was no less so. He says, "In my report to the Commissioner ... I laid particular stress upon the value of the coal lands in the pass, its suitability as a railway route and the lightness of the work in comparison with that of the Kicking Horse Pass."³

In the meantime, at the other end of the pass, William Fernie of Fort Steele and Lieutenant-Colonel Baker, then a member of the British Columbia legislature, acting on the information supplied by Michael Phillipps, began prospecting in the Elk Valley in 1887. Every summer until the railway was built they took men out of Fort Steele to prospect the outcrops⁴ and succeeded in forming a syndicate in Victoria to develop the coal lands. This was followed by the organization of a company to build the British Columbia Southern Railway, which also took over the interests of the coal syndicate. Little progress was made, however, until the formation of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company in 1897.

1. Mrs. Wood is usually credited with being the first woman to go through the pass, but a series of notes in the Macleod Gazette shows that this is not so. The editor, C.E.D. Wood, was a relative so he gave the Woods full coverage. See the Gazette for September 13, and later, 1888.
2. Macleod Gazette. September 6, 1888.
3. S. B. Steele; Forty Years in Canada. (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, 1915) Steele made the date 1887 obviously in error.
4. Fernie Free Press Souvenir Edition, Fernie, B.C. 1907.

CHAPTER 5

THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY

There were two sources from which agitation for the building of a railway through the Crow's Nest Pass originated. One was Victoria and British Columbia in general, for the mining development of the Kootenays in the seventies had been northward from Montana and Idaho, while the people of the coastal area had been cut off from their own hinterland. This draining of wealth southward seemed as if it would increase as the Great Northern was being built westward. James J. Hill planned feeder lines north into Canada, so Colonel Baker and his company led in agitation from the British Columbia side to cut off Hill's tentacles.

The other centre of agitation was the ranching area around Macleod and Pincher Creek. The possible market for ranch cattle was one factor, but fear of being left at a dead end was obviously another, especially after the building of the Canadian Pacific through Calgary and the apparently dead stop of the line from Medicine Hat at Coalbanks (Lethbridge). Every bit of publicity favorable to building a railway through the Pass was published. Violent arguments were printed refuting the claims of those who favored Howse Pass¹ (also called Tête Jaune in the same article) and setting forth the merits of the southern pass. It

1. Macleod Gazette August 30, 1888 quoting the Winnipeg Call.

reads strangely like the arguments used in 1949 to influence the Canadian and Alberta and British Columbia governments in the building of a proposed Trans-Canada highway.

There were rumors of Canadian Pacific surveyors being in the Pass in 1888. A "coal-oil spring" was discovered by W. S. Lee "in the Pass" which was later proved to be "true petroleum, purer than Pennsylvania oil." In 1889 it seemed certain that the line would be built in 1891. Notice was taken of the fabulous silver ledges in the Kootenay and of Colonel Baker's holdings near his home in "Cranbrooke" and of his trip to Britain to try to gain support there.

In the meantime, John Nelson, a North Fork rancher, discovered "genuine coking coal" along the Middle Fork near the falls and set about forming the Alberta Coal and Coke Company. Reports of the progress of Baker's "Crow's Nest Coal Company" were given frequently. By 1890 several railway charters had been applied for, Galt's North West Navigation and Coal Company being one applicant. This company was granted 3840 acres of land by the government for the project. It was reported in 1891 that the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, had delayed the line because the route was "too important to hand over to a company."¹ So the years passed with one disappointment after another, but in spite of companies sparring for time the settlers went ahead hopefully.

1. Macleod Gazette July 16, 1891.

H. D. Freemantle advertised coal from the Spring Creek mine on the Middle Fork and a company was formed to develop the "Kootenay" oil spring.

Finally in February, 1896 it was announced that the Alberta Railway and Coal Company, which had held the charter for the Crow's Nest Railway for the previous four or five years, now had the money to proceed and agreed to lease the line to the Canadian Pacific when completed. The route was to be via the Crowsnest River and "Michael" Creek to the Elk River and across the plateau to the Kootenay River, passing Cranbrook but missing Fort Steele. A proposal to grant a loan of \$20,000 per mile to help construction was defeated by what the Macleod Gazette called an "obstructionist" opposition at Ottawa. A charter was granted by the dominion government and subsidies and land grants arranged. Although it was called the British Columbia Southern Railway Company it seems to have been but a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific, for the former name was used only on maps.

Early in 1897 a Mr. McCready¹ from Golden arranged with Peter McLaren to supply ties, while the Winnipeg Free Press published the first map of the proposed line. Mr. P. Burns, a "West Kootenay Butcher"², was prepared "to buy all the cattle in the

1. The first names of McCready and Lumsden not given in Macleod Gazette from which above information was obtained.
2. This shows how little was known of the man later so well known.

country". The price was forty dollars a head for three- or four-year old steers. By July, Macleod was made construction centre under M. J. Haney and a Mr. Lumsden. By the end of 1897 two news items appeared which set the pattern for many later press releases from the Crow's Nest Pass. The first stated that Mr. C. E. D. Wood, who was magistrate, had left for Crow's Nest Lake -- a new "town" along the line -- to prosecute, before Inspectors Sanders and Cuthbert, a man named Luce for selling liquor without a licence. The other item told of a rumor of labor troubles in the Pass which were said to have led to the resignation of Mr. Haney.

The N. W. M. P. were in charge of policing the line during construction and were sworn as special British Columbia police officers to give them full authority in that province. They¹ reported 3,500 men employed in construction. There was not too much lawlessness considering that ten thousand dollars' worth of liquor was imported each month, which was sold at twice that much to the workers. However, one or two murders were committed during the two years of construction, for many people, like Luce, followed the men with illicit liquor. Old construction workers stated that the hotel at Crow's Nest Lake had a barrel of whiskey on the counter at all times for self-service -- at seventy-five cents per glass.

1. Report of Commissioner N. W. M. P. 1898.
(Ottawa: King's Printer, 1898).

Labor troubles were inevitable, for the investigation¹ into construction, following the death of two workers, revealed deplorable conditions in the camps. It also gave a graphic picture of the Pass in those days.

The farthest west camp during 1897 was Mann's, at a point a little to the east of the present Fernie, while others were strung out along the line to Seventh Siding near Pincher Creek, which was the end of steel in December. The bunkhouses in all camps were unsanitary and overcrowded. Wages were \$1.75 a day while board cost about 75¢. There were doctors in two districts, Dr. Roy² in Alberta and Dr. Gordon on the British Columbia side under the general supervision of Dr. F. H. Mewburn. Crow's Nest Lake, just east of the cave, was a very large camp from which the blasting work around the lake was directed. Joe Bricker and Henry Johnson Sr. had a store there and a Mrs. Taylor ran a boarding house. Dr. Roy's headquarters were here also. Not mentioned in any reports were such establishments as that of Fat Alice, which was ostensibly a restaurant but well remembered for its more illicit activities.

1. Report of the Commission Inquiring into the Death of McDonald and Fraser of the Crow's Nest Railway.
R. C. Clute, Commissioner. 1899 Ottawa. Sessional Papers No. 70 Vol. 33 No. 14.
2. Names as given in Clute report except where local citizens could recall the proper first names. Probably the two doctors were Dr. Phillippe Roy (later a well-known Canadian diplomat) and Dr. A. J. Gordon of Calgary.

About five miles west of the main centre was Bull Head, or Bull's Head, which was probably near the site of the present Crowsnest. John Bidgood was reported to have a "place" at the Loop while east of the lake Douglas Allison's ranch was noted. Sherman Paris or Parrish was also located there at the time but was not mentioned in the Clute Commission report. However there was a McGillivray living where the town of Coleman now stands. At the springs was a man called Willoughby (who was a son-in-law of W. S. Lee), whose home was now a "hotel" for trappers and prospectors. Water from the springs was piped to "baths" across the railway right-of-way and while the "baths" were often rented to others, Willoughby always kept control of the water supply and was known on occasion to cut off the flow of the healing fluid whenever he became displeased with the renters. The agent at Seventh Siding was Reuben Steeves, who was later a prominent citizen of Frank, and owned the Imperial Hotel.

By the spring of 1898, Crow's Nest Lake was a ghost town, and nothing much is left today to mark the site but a few mouldering logs. The rather extensive graveyard was left unmarked, but by 1906, when the graves had sunk in, a group of men from Coleman came and filled the depressions. Other such places have been obliterated by time. In 1899 the Fernie Free Press published a list of names of men buried in a little forgotten cemetery which a resident had discovered accidentally.

In spite of a statement that the maximum gradient of the pass was only "one foot in a hundred",¹ the actual maximum was two percent and until quite recently a stretch of road near Hillcrest had a two and a half percent rise. The steepest grade on the west side was between Crowsnest and Michel, where there was a 1.2 percent grade. The only tunnel on the line was along this stretch but this was eliminated in 1950 when the railway was rerouted around the hill.²

The road cost nineteen million dollars to build, but this was reduced by a subsidy of \$3,381,000 from the Canadian government. A grant of six square miles of coal lands was also made and the company chose the area around Hosmer. This was later developed by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

One of the conditions for the aid granted in the building of the railway was the well known Crow's Nest Pass freight rate agreement, whereby special lower freight rates for certain western goods were set by act of parliament. Although this had very little to do with the Pass itself, the attendant publicity has made the name a household word in Canada, even though most Canadians might not be too sure of its location.

1. Gibbon; op. cit. p. 340.

2. Railwaymen report that the tunnel had become unsafe.

The railway did not cross the barrier of Kootenay Lake for many years but the Spokane International Railway¹ connected by a branch south from Yahk to Kingsgate became the way "out" for the residents of the Pass. The Spokane Flyer became the main "express" train through Lethbridge and the Pass and it was considered a point of honor if the new towns could persuade the railway company to have the Flyer stop at their stations. By World War I the Kettle Valley line was completed and the cars were ferried across Kootenay Lake so that direct access to Vancouver was possible and the Spokane Flyer disappeared.² As Calgary grew it became more important to residents of the East Kootenay from Cranbrook east. At present the Crow's Nest Pass line is more important for its freight than for its passenger service, but has proved to be a very valuable alternate route when the main line of the Canadian Pacific is blocked by the not infrequent snow and mud slides.

1. Completed November, 1905. Operates $10\frac{1}{2}$ mile branch from Yahk to Kingsgate for the C. P. R.
2. No. 7 and No. 8, the passenger trains, called the Spokane Flyer from Minneapolis to Portland, Oregon, ceased running on February 14, 1914. Jimmy Wallwork now of Lethbridge was the engineer on the last run. Nos. 11 and 12 were popularly called the "Flyer" by Pass citizens for some years afterwards.

Mount Fernie, Fernie, B. C.

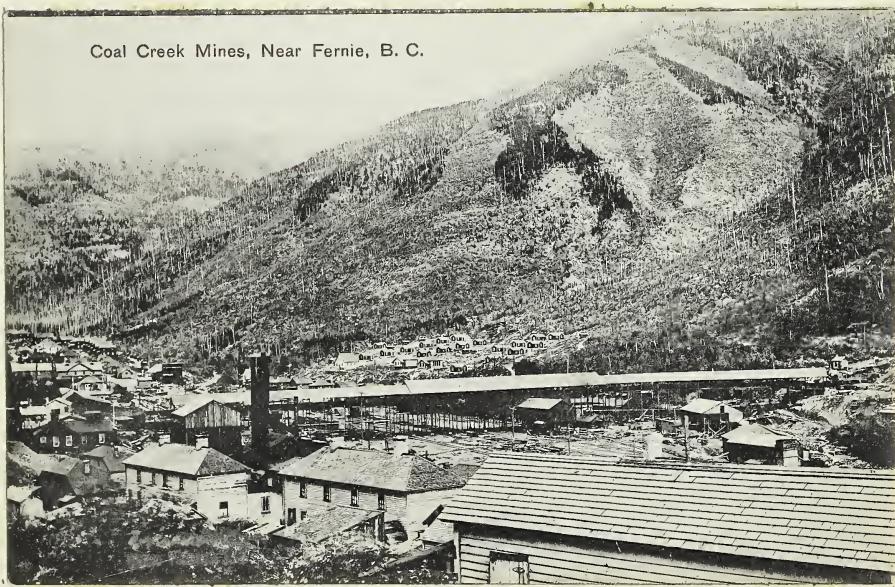


Pictures taken before 1908

The photograph above shows West Fernie. The bridge in the background is that of the Great Northern Railway.

Spalding photographs

Coal Creek Mines, Near Fernie, B. C.



CHAPTER 6

SETTLEMENT AND FOUNDING OF THE TOWNS

Because its mine at Coal Creek was already developed, Fernie was the first settlement to spring to life when the railway arrived and in a very short time the low log huts of 1897 became known as "Old Town". A map¹ will show that apart from the Canadian Pacific's six square mile grant and two government blocks of 5,000 and 45,000 acres, all the coal measures from Elko northward up the Elk Valley for about sixty miles and through the Crow's Nest Pass to the Alberta boundary belonged to the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company. This fact had an important bearing on the nature of the communities which grew up in the area. The company obviously intended that all the commercial activities of the British Columbia zone were to centre on Fernie, which was located on a wide flat along the Elk River. There were no coal mines near it and except for the period when coke was manufactured there, Fernie has never had the appearance of a mining camp as all the other communities have. The mines were at Coal Creek, six miles east, at Morrissey, seven miles south, and at Michel, twenty-five miles north-east, and were to have been linked by the

1. See Mining Pitching Seams in North-West Canada by T. H. Wilson in 1949 Coal Mine Modernization Year Book (no publisher given).

Morrissey, Fernie and Michel Railway.¹ At first, therefore, Fernie was the Crow's Nest Pass and many of the original settlers of the other pass towns came directly to Fernie and from there moved to the other places as they opened up.

In the spring of 1899, Fernie had two hotels but the illicit liquor business by the shack town bootleggers remaining from construction days was very great. There was no school although it was estimated that there were over one hundred children of school age in the place. By March, a Board of Trade, led by H. Bentley and G. S. Henderson, editor of the Free Press, and a provisional school board led by Wm. Blakemore, the general manager of the coal company, had been elected. A Catholic church was ready by Easter (April 2), while the Anglicans opened a temporary church, called by the newspaper a "vestry", shortly afterwards. The Presbyterian Church had been active since 1898 when the Rev. Mr. Oliver held services in a log shack in the Old Town. In May, the Salvation Army appeared in Fernie. A waterworks had been installed the year previously but it had frozen during the winter. Wooden sidewalks were built in 1899.

In June of 1899 a school was opened under a Miss Lawrence in the Presbyterian Church and sixty children attended. On

1. Apparently there was some connection between the granting of land and the building of railways. The M. F. & M. R. is now only four miles long and is claimed to be the world's smallest completely equipped railroad.

August 21, two qualified teachers, F. J. Watson and Miss Annie Doran, took over the school at monthly salaries of \$65 and \$45 respectively. There were 107 pupils by August.

In a "Review of Progress" in 1900 the Free Press reported 125 buildings in the "old town" and 29 cottages for miners in Fernie in addition to twelve double houses at the mines (Coal Creek), the last two groups built by the coal company. The same year saw another schoolroom opened and a new Methodist Church under the Rev. F. B. Stillman. It is interesting to note that Fernie with 273 had the largest number of voters of any town in the East Kootenay in the provincial election of 1900.

The Board of Trade pressed for incorporation but the company, owning all the land, opposed this. However the company did install electric lights and new waterworks.

The census of 1901 showed that there were 1640 people in Fernie and 476 in Michel. There were 202 pupils in five schoolrooms, counting 64 at the "mines".

The company agreed to the laying out of a townsite and lots went on sale in July, 1901. Even the terrible explosion¹ in Coal Creek on May 22, 1902, which killed 128 out of 800 men who worked there, did not stop the expansion, for the mines at Morrissey were opened the same year. Fernie's first strike occurred this year when a dispute between the company, represented

1. See below, p. 129.

by the general manager, a Mr. Tonkin, and the men, broke out over hours of work. Tonkin also became involved with the merchants of Fernie when he opened company stores in the closed towns of Morrissey and Coal Creek, although the merchants had been promised no competition. The disagreement ended in the formation of the Trites-Wood Company, which has operated stores in all the towns opened by the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company down to the present.

On April 29, 1904, Fernie, then a community with ten hotels, had its whole business section practically destroyed by a fire which started in Richards' General Store. Six complete blocks were wiped out.

The company finally agreed to allow incorporation of the city if the coke ovens were not included in the limits, and the Corporation of the City of Fernie came into being on August 19, 1904, with Alfred Stork as mayor, and six aldermen; A. H. Cree, A. B. Trites, A. C. Liphardt, P. R. Lundie, Thomas Beck, and J. A. McLean. A city school board was set up, headed by J. C. Hutchinson and having T. H. White and George Cody as trustees. There was also an attendance officer to enforce the compulsory school attendance act, which required attendance of all children from seven to twelve inclusive. Coal Creek was set off as a new school district.

The Great Northern Railway's subsidiary, the Crow's Nest Southern Railway, which had come to Morrissey earlier in the year,

continued to Fernie and the first Great Northern train steamed into Fernie on December 15, and afforded another outlet for the coal of the pass. An additional area, known as the Annex, was added to the city in 1905, and a telephone system was installed. Another fire spreading from the forests outside the city burned down several more blocks which had just been rebuilt, but the expansion was greater than ever. In 1907 the streets were lit by electricity and sewers (the only ones in the Pass right to the present) were laid. A fine new covered rink was opened in March, 1908, and then on August 1, the whole city was destroyed by a forest fire, except for two buildings, one of which was the company's office. Damage was so great that all Canada sent aid to the inhabitants of the stricken city. Newspaper accounts stated that ten people had died but there was no way of knowing with any certainty.

Fernie people immediately started rebuilding, for the boom days were still with them and the numerous smelters were crying for more and more coke. As the company built new coke ovens to meet the demand, the people went ahead and rebuilt the eleven hotels, the brewery, the schools, the business blocks and the homes. All new buildings had to be of stone, brick or concrete. Although permits for temporary buildings were granted, the law was strict, and these were not allowed to clutter the streets for long.¹ In fact,

1. The Free Press suggested a speed law for "peripatetic" buildings.

the rebuilding caused a small boom of its own, for the Fernie Brick Company was turning out twenty thousand bricks a day, while two hundred and fifty carloads of cement were brought in. The sawmills up and down the valley were working full blast with a great deal of the lumber being used locally.

There was only one small cloud in the sky of prosperity for the "Pittsburgh of Canada", as the Free Press called Fernie, and that was the cessation of construction of the railway up the Elk Valley when Guthrie and Company withdrew their equipment "owing to temporary financial stringency in the United States".¹ However, other developments in the district more than made up for this.

Besides opening up Coal Creek, which had become a separate community by this time, the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company had developed properties to the north and south. Carbonado Collieries was opened on Morrissey Creek on a spur of about four miles in length in 1902 although development work had started earlier. Morrissey² started hopefully and even had a newspaper by September, 1902, but the opening of the Townsite was a disaster to a town of "but two dozen houses".³ Another little townsite

1. Free Press; December 4, 1908.

2. Morrissey was a confusing medley of townsites. There was Morrissey at the junction, Morrissey Townsite where the coke ovens were built, and Morrissey Mines which was farthest up. Tonkin was in addition to this.

3. Morrissey Miner; April 23, 1903.



Natal-Michel, looking east.
Natal is nearest the camera, with the smoke of
the coke ovens in the middle distance and Michel
beyond. Note the narrow valley.
Photo -- courtesy Department of Mines, Ottawa.

called Tonkin appeared in which the general manager of the mines had some interest. Lots were sold in competition with the company townsite. At Morrissey Mines there were twenty-five cottages and two hotels in 1902 and a one-roomed school was opened. The company controlled the issuing of liquor licences here, but when the townsite was opened in September, there were ten applications for hotel licences and all were granted -- for a population of about one hundred. There was only one store, which belonged to the company, and the miners complained of its exorbitant prices. A four-roomed school was ready by the fall term in 1903 for the children of the two hundred men employed. A short note in the Fernie newspaper telling of the difficulty of igniting Carbonado coal indicated that Morrissey's life might be short. The mines closed in 1905, reopened in 1907, and finally closed altogether in 1909 "because of dangerous workings". Some of the buildings were cut in half and taken to Coal Creek, where they still stand. The rest were torn down after being sold for small sums, and the lumber used in houses in the other towns.¹

The third effort of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, at Michel about twenty-three miles north of Fernie, has been probably the most successful of all. It started almost immediately after Coal Creek and has produced continuously since 1899. The distance

1. Jack Hughes; A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia. (U. of Alberta) p. 90.

from Fernie was too great to make Michel a "feeder" for the former town, even although the company obviously intended such a plan, and there has always been a quasi-independence movement on the part of the Michel-Natal inhabitants, especially as the Michel mines have since 1903 employed more men than Coal Creek. Being somewhat closer to the Alberta towns, the twin communities have had more dealings with them than with Fernie. Michel itself has always been a company town and has the character of such a town today, with its rows of identical houses. Twelve of these cottages were built in 1900 and shortly afterwards there was a hotel and a store, all company owned. The coke ovens were built the following year. A school was opened almost immediately, but owing to some dispute, the school board was inactive until about 1902. About half of the town was destroyed by a bush fire in June 1902. The town experienced its first mine explosion in January, 1904, when seven men were killed. A two-roomed school was built in August 1904.

A new townsite was opened about three quarters of a mile west of Michel in September 1907 and lots went on sale for an "open" town. In March 1909, the Great Northern Railway made this New Michel its terminus. A newspaper, the Michel Reporter, existed for a short time in 1908 and 1909 and in a special issue noted that the town was served by three railways (counting the Fernie, Morrissey and Michel Railroad). There was a branch of the

Imperial Bank in each of the towns, three churches -- Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist -- and nine stores. There were two schools; one with two rooms in Old Michel and the other with one room in New Michel, as the town was called when a post office was opened there in April 1909. "Not Newton, Newtown or New Townsite but New Michel!" said the Reporter. Its joy was short-lived, for the Canadian Pacific, seeking a name for its new station, struck on the name "Natal", which was highly unpopular. Some people wished to boycott the name but the town is still Natal.

The Canadian Pacific Railway chose its section of the coalfield, in accordance with the government grant, a few miles north of Fernie, and by 1908 coal was being produced at Hosmer. A very elaborate coal cleaning system was installed and 240 beehive ovens were built. The company, the Pacific Coal Company, built a number of fine cottages and workmen soon flocked to the town. By 1910 there were three hotels, a Bank of Montreal branch, and a Methodist church. The Anglican congregation met in the Opera House. Mr. A. A. Davis was principal of a two-roomed school which had 73 pupils. Lacking civic government, the people organized a Board of Trade, which, as its first job, equipped a volunteer fire brigade. The town was very fire-conscious as only a miracle had prevented its destruction in the forest fire of 1908.

About the same time D. C. Corbin of Spokane became actively interested in his holdings in the Flathead area, which is

not part of the Elk Valley field but is, however, part of the Crowsnest coal basin. The Eastern British Columbia Railway was built twelve and a half miles from McGillivray siding, east of Michel, to the twenty-four square mile coal area. This was called Corbin townsite, while another townsite was laid out about thirteen miles farther south, known as Flathead townsite. However, although a little prospecting was done, few buildings were erected and the railway did not go past Corbin.

The seams of coal at Corbin are almost legendary. Names such as "the mountain of coal" and "the world's thickest coal seam" have been applied to it.¹ This phenomenon was due to a tremendous twisting of the strata so that many of the seams were standing on end rather than in the trough-like formation of those of the Elk Valley. The Mammoth seam in Coal Mountain has been measured at a point where it was 180 feet thick, but some engineers have estimated that at some parts it may be 450 to 600 feet thick. The only road into Corbin was the one built by the government of British Columbia from Crowsnest through Tent Mountain Pass into the Flathead and down to the international boundary. This was a very rudimentary road and lack of convenient transportation tended to keep Corbin in the backwash of life in the Pass and very few of its teams appeared in the

1. B. R. McKay; Corbin Coalfield, Canadian Mining and Metallurgical Bulletin. Montreal, November, 1931, p. 1273.

various Crow's Nest Pass sports leagues.¹ Corbin was a "closed" camp and the miners accused the company stores of ² overcharging their customers.

The eastern side of the Pass was not as tightly controlled by one company as was the western side. Consequently, swarms of prospectors swept over the area during the construction period and immediately afterwards. Because the seams are of short fault formation, they outcrop for miles to the north and south, while the distances between outcrops are only a mile or two. As the outcrops are more accessible than many, discoveries were made by different men along the same seam. Thus the York Creek property, International Coal and Coke Company, and McGillivray Coal and Coke Company are all strung out along the same seam at Coleman. This led at first to a large number of mines and consequently of townsites. Only those properties with easy access to the railway, however, developed into important mines. The coal back from the valley is still practically untouched. There was a large number of "towns" at first -- ten in a distance of less than fourteen miles. Five have survived to the present.

The same desire as in British Columbia, to manufacture coke to supply the demands of the many smelters of the coast

1. It is interesting to note that Corbin was on Pacific standard time when all the other pass towns were on Mountain time.
2. The Fernie District Ledger stated in 1912 that prices were 20% above those of the surrounding towns.

province and Montana, motivated the founders of the Alberta mines. Thus, early reports stressed the building of coke ovens as the mark of progress.

Blairmore was the first community in this section of the Pass although it was nothing more than a section house and a freight car station. It was first called Tenth Siding but later was given the name The Springs. On November 15, 1898, it was given its present name in honour of two contractors, Blair and either More or a name ending in -more,¹ when the operating department of the railway took over from the contracting firms. H. E. Lyon, the agent, and Felix Montalbetti, the section foreman, were the first settlers. Both erected cabins in the spring of 1899. Mr. Lyon opened a store in 1900 and R. E. Fishburn and T. G. Proctor acquired coal properties to the north and south of the railway. When Frank mine opened in 1901, Blairmore boomed and was declared a village on September 3, 1901. Three hotels and several other buildings went up. The land now had value, so both Lyon and Montalbetti claimed to have squatters' rights to it. When Malcolm McKenzie bought out Montalbetti's interest, a long litigation ensued which almost ruined the village, for no one could get a clear title to land in it. Because of this

1. The name was coined as Lundbreck was made from Breckenridge and Lund, contractors who built much in the pass, -- e.g., the Morrissey spur. Other sources say the name came from that of the Minister of Mines Blair.



Above. Blairmore, looking westward from Turtle Mountain across the Crowsnest Trough. Mt. Phillipps at left and Crowsnest Mountain at right. This area was the bull pasture of the eighties.

Below. Bellevue business section, looking towards Turtle Mountain and the Frank slide.

Alberta Government Photographs



uncertainty workers and businessmen preferred to build in Frank, where the ownership of the land was not in doubt.

Fortunately, the West Canadian Collieries located its headquarters in Blairmore and, although they at first developed properties in Lille and Bellevue, they evidently expected that Blairmore would serve as a central city as Fernie had in the Elk Valley. It was just chance that the West Canadian Company's biggest mine should later be developed at Blairmore.

By 1907, when the litigation was settled, Blairmore had a two-roomed school. In 1906 the Rocky Mountain Cement Company, formed by W. J. Budd and W. M. Alexander and others, located in the town and commenced construction of a fine plant, boasting coal, shale and limestone, all in a radius of one mile. It was in 1908 that the plant commenced operation.

W. A. Beebe was prominent in civic government from early times, being both village overseer and chairman of the school board in 1905. In 1910 a group consisting of Thomas Frayer, Louis Dutil and J. A. McDonald acted as a council with W. A. Beebe as secretary and led a movement to incorporate the town. On November 1, 1911, with H. E. Lyon as mayor, the town of Blairmore elected as its first councillors, L. Dutil, J. H. Farmer, Archie McLeod, Charles Chestnut, D. A. Sinclair and J. G. Smith.

A great deal of building went on at this time and the West Canadian took over the mining property, south of the

railway, which had been developed by Mr. Chestnut, and the mine to the north of the town, prospected by R. E. Fishburn and T. G. Proctor. The latter deal proved so profitable that the south mine was closed and the Greenhill Mine working No. 2 seam became the mainstay of the town. One hundred and fifty buildings were erected in little over a year and there were six rooms in the school by 1912. Henry Pelletier that year opened a brickyard which was taken over by the cement company. An "opera" house was built through the efforts of Mr. W. A. Beebe and his "boosters" club and an open air rink was in operation by winter. Even a brewery was started but this ran into financial difficulties and never went into production.¹ When the customs office was moved from Frank to Blairmore and the Alberta government telephone service was centered there and the railway company decided that the Spokane Flyer would stop at the new station, it seemed that Blairmore was well on its way to becoming a large city and would merit the title bestowed upon it by the Blairmore Enterprise -- "The Eldorado of the Golden West".

In the meantime the council set the pattern which has given Blairmore publicity, both good and bad, throughout the nation, and made it the best known town in the area. As if the litigation over the ownership of the townsite had not been enough, there were soon other battles which were quite as fierce while they

1. The Blairmore Enterprise files supplied material for most of the above.

lasted. In 1908 Joe Little was granted the title to the quarter section which contained the graveyard and even though Mr. Little turned back the plot to the town, the papers raised a storm and charged the Liberals with dirty politics. Then there was a dispute over the choice of lots for the fire hall and a split in the council over the dismissal of the chief of police. This did not hinder the growth of the town in any way.

Much of Blairmore's prosperity came from the activities of the coal company which had its head office there. The first effort of the West Canadian Company was at Lille. J. J. Fleutot and C. Remy, two representatives of Gold Fields Limited of British Columbia, hearing of a coal mine at Frank, came down and prospected Gold Creek for gold.¹ In 1901, they worked up towards Grassy Mountain and started to work the coal seams there. They established what was called "French Camp" that year. The pack trail became a wagon road by 1902, while a railroad was started and built to Number 1 camp in the same year. Fleutot organized the West Canadian Collieries Limited, an English company with French capital, on April 2, 1903.

The company received a bad setback at the end of April, when the Frank landslide covered half a mile of its connecting railway, necessitating the building of a switchback to gain the required elevation over the rocks. The railway was completed by

1. Much of the information on the West Canadian Collieries was supplied by W. H. Chappell of Blairmore, who is compiling a history of the company.

autumn and production started. Fifty Bernard-type coke ovens were put in by a Belgian company. Houses were built and a school opened with thirty pupils. C. Faure opened a "commodious" hotel which was owned by Fleutot and Dr. Thomas O'Hagen set up a fifteen bed hospital. In 1904 the village of Lille was established. O. E. S. Whiteside took over as manager in 1904 and by 1907 the daily output was seven hundred tons of coal. A tipple was built and a wet-type washer put in to clean the coal intended for the ovens.

In the meantime, Fleutot had bought the Byron Creek coal property and the Bellevue¹ prospect which opened right onto the railway. At first Bellevue had only temporary surface structures for the mine but fifteen cottages and a hotel (under the same auspices as the Lille Hotel) were built. Neither Bellevue or Lille had wash-houses in 1906. Bellevue mine was idle 78 days because of a railway car shortage in that year, so things did not look too bright for Bellevue as a town, but in 1907 the Maple Leaf Coal Company was formed by Spokane interests to develop another seam nearby. Lots were put on sale by the West Canadian Company after Robert Connelly had surveyed the townsite, while Maple Leaf was opened by Jacob (Jake) Whiller in September 1909 and buildings

1. It was Mr. Fleutot who is reputed to have said "Quelle belle vue!" after which expression the town was named.

went up "like mushrooms". In the same year the West Canadian Company erected a large tipple and the community of Bellevue was well established. An attempt was made to incorporate the area about 1915 but the plan came to nought.¹

The first serious mine explosion in the Alberta section of the Pass took place in Bellevue in 1910, when on December 9, thirty men were killed.

The village of Frank had probably the most auspicious start of any town in the Pass. Coal was discovered in Turtle Mountain in 1901 by Henry S. Pelletier. W. S. Gebo, who had been working the "Burmiss" properties, bought him out and interested the Hon. H. L. Frank, of Butte, Montana, in the mountain seams. They formed the Canadian American Company and started immediately to develop the coal deposits. On September 10, 1901, there was a public opening of the townsite with special trains running from as far west as Cranbrook. Even the Hon. F. G. Haultain, Premier of the North West Territories, and his Minister of Public Works were in attendance.

Lots were priced high to discourage shack building. There were twenty-five company cottages, a large boarding house and a post office in Frank before the official opening in September, and the population was estimated at 300. By 1903 the

1. A movement instituted in 1950 looks as if it might succeed and Bellevue may yet be a town.

town was well built up. Mr. Gebo acted as overseer when the village was organized and was then elected to the same post in 1902 and 1903. He was followed by J. H. Farmer, the bank manager, who acted until Alberta's Village Act came into effect in 1907. There were high hopes for a population of 2,000 by the end of 1903, but the terrible landslide of April 29, 1903,¹ checked the growth for a time. However, the slide itself was not so disastrous to Frank as is often believed. The mine surface property, which had been practically destroyed, was rebuilt within two months, while production of coal was resumed by the end of May² and slowly increased thereafter.

In 1905, a new tipple was built and with it a washhouse. A new shaft mine was opened to the north away from Turtle Mountain. The coal company bought the "sanatorium" at the springs and built a hotel on the site which became one of the finest hostellries in the country. An ornate stage coach carried the guests the half mile from the railroad. Charles Sartoris, a prominent Blairmore businessman, was for a number of years the proud driver of this conveyance.

About the same time (1905), the Canadian Metal Company erected a zinc smelter in Frank, proposing to haul ore from Slocan, British Columbia. Coke ovens were built and several test

1. The slide is dealt with below. - Chapter 12.
2. From an article by Mark Drumm in the Fernie Free Press special edition 1907. Drumm was Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian American Company as well as editor of the Frank Paper.

runs were made at the plant, but no commercial production took place owing to unsuspected difficulties and the company was on the verge of financial collapse.¹ It was taken over by the New Canadian Metal Company and its manager, Samuel S. Fowler, closed the works in 1906.

All the expansion, coupled with the fact that Frank was the junction point for Lille, tended to make the village the bustling centre of the pass. Blairmore residents walked the mile into town, while Coleman people often went down by train to shop. Even the government order in 1911 to move the town from the menace of another slide might not have been a fatal blow to the village had conditions in the mine kept up to their early promise.

² Had Charles Plummer Hill been able to make up his mind, Hillcrest would probably have been the first town to be founded, for Hill had prospected the whole area in 1900 and it was he who first got Gebo, Frank and Senator Carter interested in the Burmiss (Burmis) properties. They, in subsequent trips, discovered other seams along the valley. Among these was the prospect at McLaren's Camp on Coleman's outcrops and the Greenhill deposits which were discovered by Joe Little. The coal on the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia was also investigated by this group.

1. Hughes op. cit. p. 84.

2. Not related to James J. Hill as far as can be learned.

Hill decided that the Hillcrest area was best but it was January, 1905, before he was satisfied and the Hillcrest Coal and Coke Company was incorporated. Hill was managing director with full rights to keep Hillcrest a closed camp. The town had high hopes in 1907, for it already had a station and a post office as well as the usual small school.

Somewhat to the east of Hillcrest, the Leitch Collieries opened in 1907 with two mines, one to the north of the river and the other to the south. The tipple and railway connections were finished in 1908 and by 1910 a hundred coke ovens had been built in the nearby Police Flat. L. H. Hamilton was manager and first reports suggested that the town would be named after him but Passburg was the title finally chosen. The community was on the hill just west of Police Flat. A hotel, the New Passburg, was put up in 1910 and from the advertisements appearing in the newspapers of the other towns, there seemed to be a good number of business establishments. The Union Bank had a branch there and several churches were constructed. A school opened with thirty pupils, while the company built the apparently customary twenty-five cottages. By 1912, J. Kerr and A. P. Hughes took steps towards incorporation, but this never came about.

All the mines in the aforementioned towns are within a mile or two of each other, but west of Blairmore, the only seam of importance west to the Rockies is the one which runs north and south

through Coleman, which is over four miles from Blairmore. Because of this, the town has developed independently, and, while Blairmore and Frank alternated as shopping centres for the other towns, Coleman went its way alone and soon boasted the largest population of any centre on the Alberta side, although the figures were usually exaggerated.

Several men had prospected the seam near McGillivray's Hill, the most important being P. A. Paulson, probably in conjunction with Joe Little. The prospect at Paulson's camp, as it was called, was north of the river on Nez Perce Creek. This was developed by means of horse-drawn cars running down a track to the present railway station. The ties still remained when the first hotel was built, as the railway from the mine ran right through what is now the centre of town.

In 1903 the International Coal and Coke Company bought out Paulson and developed the section south of the river as the Dennison Collieries, although no one ever calls it anything but the International Mine. On October 22, 1903, lots went on sale but the inhabitants lived in tents most of the year or stayed at hotels in Blairmore. By Christmas the Coleman Hotel opened and it still stands today practically unchanged. In 1904 E. E. Reynolds came as mine superintendent and much development took place. The population was "estimated" at 500 by the end of the year. As the area was part of Blairmore School District the townspeople had to arrange with the

Blairmore trustees to open the first school, which was held in the Anglican Mission hall with Miss Nettie McIntyre as teacher. The school district was organized in 1905 and, after moving from one hall to another, the school children were finally housed in a new school at the end of the year and there were three rooms in operation by 1907. Alexander Cameron, F. G. Graham and the Rev. R. A. Robinson were the first school trustees.

G. M. Tripp was the first village overseer in 1903, followed by D. J. McIntyre, who served until 1907 when, under the provisions of the new Alberta Village Act, a council consisting of A. Cameron, F. G. Graham and D. F. Hughes, was elected. The early town leaders were very active and had water, electric light and telephone systems installed by 1905.

Rev. R. A. Robinson led his Anglican congregation into a new chapel in 1903. The other two churches were opened under quite distinguished auspices. Rev. T. M. Murray opened an Institutional (Presbyterian) church in April, 1906, to which Rev. C. W. Gordon (Ralph Gordon) had contributed a sum of money. When the Roman Catholic Church, opened in 1906 under Father Lepine, was dedicated in November, 1910, Father Lacombe was present at the ceremony and gave a crucifix to the church.

The International Company went ahead building surface works and especially a battery of 216 beehive-type coke ovens to supply the smelter at Greenwood, British Columbia.

In December, 1908, a new company known as the McGillivray Coal and Coke Company was formed to take over the seams to the north of the railway. With J. K. Crane and J. F. Povah in charge, the output was about 150 tons a day by 1910, when a fine steel tipple was erected. The company opened a townsite called Carbondale but although some houses were built there, most of the workers continued to live in Coleman.

Coleman grew rapidly but a post office was not opened for some time because the government would not at first accept the name, which was taken from that of Florence Coleman Flummerfelt, the daughter of the president of the townsite company. The postal authorities finally relented and acceded to the wishes of the townspeople. Coleman was not a closed town but the company reserved the right to control the sale of liquor for fifteen years. This was challenged by a Coleman resident but the courts upheld the company.

Because of its hilly nature, Coleman, more than any other town in the Pass, seems to fall into several natural areas, each rather limited in size. Consequently, when the village was formed, only part of the residential area was taken into it. Slavtown, separated by a rock bluff, and Bushtown and Graftontown, would be something like "tax colonies" around a large city, paying (apart from the school levy) nothing but nominal taxes to the Local Improvement District. Several attempts were made to include these areas as well

as the mine property in the village limits. In 1910, after much negotiation, Slavtown joined Coleman and was henceforth known as West Coleman. At the same time Coleman became a town with Alex Cameron as its first mayor.

CHAPTER 7

THE END OF THE BOOM AND READJUSTMENT

The opening of the McGillivray mine marks the end of the period of expansion, for no other large mining companies came into the area after this. In fact by 1911, a turning point could be noticed. The development had corresponded fairly closely to the filling up of the prairie country following the increase in prices after the Klondike discoveries in 1898 and to the railway expansion of Laurier's time. As 1911 marked the end of the Liberal regime in Canada, so did 1911 put an end to the long list of companies floated on the strength of Crow's Nest Pass coal. First, the capital, which had been so easy to obtain, now seemed to disappear. Millions of dollars had come from France, Belgium and other countries almost for the asking. The promoters had often used pictures of tipples of established mines to put on prospectuses of unproven properties. Some of these frauds were exposed and money became difficult to get. People who lived in Frank at the time have stated that the building of the smelter there had not been carefully considered beforehand, resulting in an enormous expenditure for a plant that did not turn out anything but a few souvenir ounces of zinc.¹ In fact the whole

1. Hughes (op. cit. p. 67) states that the Frank retort actually bankrupted the company.

smelter business in British Columbia had been overbuilt, resulting in the closing of all but the one at Trail, so that one after another, the coke oven batteries at the various mines were closed. By the end of the first World War, only Michel and Fernie were producing coke and Fernie for only a short time. Lille, Passburg, Coleman, Frank, Morrissey and Hosmer had all produced coke at first and seemed to be unable to keep up with the demand in the early years of the century.

The mines producing for the railways and for domestic use had worked erratically for a number of years. In fact the editor of the Frank Paper noted in 1909 that there had been "two periods of prosperity and two of the opposite,"¹ i.e. in a period of eight years. Much of the idleness, (apart from the frequent strikes) was due to shortages of boxcars.² In a provincial government survey in 1907, it was shown that Bellevue had lost 78 days from this cause alone. However there was no pessimism resulting from these stoppages for they were considered to be more irksome than dangerous. In the general election of 1911, the question of the tariff, which shut off the American markets for coal and coke, was one of the local issues.

1. The Frank Paper, March 18, 1909.

2. Although there are special coal cars, most coal is shipped in boxcars. The tendency is to call all cars boxcars.

When the United Mine Workers of America called a strike in 1911, the shortage of orders was more of a factor to be considered. Consequently, the operators did not surrender quickly to the demands as they often do on a buoyant market. The strike dragged on for eight months with increasing violence. Many men did not belong to the union and the number of "scabs" who went back to work increased until the union was forced to give way. This is one of the few strikes in which the union has been completely defeated.

However, some people did not realize that the boom was over for a positive land boom started in 1910 and carried on into 1912. New townsites were surveyed and lots put on sale. In Coleman alone four separate areas were platted.¹ Besides Bushtown, which was laid out by Alex. Morrison and renamed East Coleman, and Graftontown developed by G. Grafton and J. H. Farmer, there was Carbondale, put on sale by the McGillivray Creek Coal Company, and two miles to the south-east a townsite was surveyed for the York Creek mine which was operated by the International Company. West Blairmore and Burmis were also subdivided and sold as lots. Probably the strangest location was at Crowsnest Lake, where Lake City was staked out by the Cyr, Matheson, Pelletier group with no other prospect than the hope that a newly discovered bed of clay might be developed. This whole trend was very likely a

1. This word seems to be standard in newspaper reports and means "laid out in plots or plats".

reflection of similar acts on the prairies, but no other townsites were laid out in the mountains after 1912.

1912 was a bad year in which the government was obliged to give some assistance in the form of bridge and road building projects. A road was built around Coleman's bluff with the miners getting a few days work each. 1913 was a better year and with all mines now well developed, the largest amount of coal to that time was produced. This represented peak production for many years. Not until machines stripped coal from the surface in World War II was this mark surpassed.

In 1912, the unemployment had been made worse by the first real setback that the Pass had received. Lille mine ran into trouble when the coal began to get dirty in pockets. Operation costs were high and with the collapse of the coke market, the company decided to close the mine, which was abandoned in 1913.

Frank mine had also been having a great deal of trouble producing cheap coal. Now that competition was getting keener, marginal mines were having a difficult time. A series of faults in the mine and a fire in the workings led to several idle periods until the Canadian Coal Consolidated Company¹ went into liquidation in 1913. Reorganized as the Franco-Canadian Collieries, the mines reopened in 1914. However the fire reappeared and set off a gas

1. The name had been changed from Canadian American when H. L. Frank sold out his interest some time after the slide.

explosion in 1917 which led to the closing of the mine permanently. So disappeared the only shaft mine in the Crow's Nest Pass.

In June, 1914, the Canadian Pacific Railway found that their property at Hosmer was unprofitable through dirty coal of poor quality and characteristically closed the mine without delay.

The coming of the first World War brought about a definite depression in its first two years and real distress was evident. In December, 1915, the Leitch Collieries in Passburg were late in meeting their payroll. No taxes had been collected in the place the previous year and in September 1915 the schools were closed with the teachers unpaid. Blairmore had almost as much difficulty and in April, 1915, cut the teachers' salaries¹ and prepared to seize property for non-payment of taxes. By November there was danger of the schools closing altogether. Coleman dismissed the entire staff of its school to rehire at lower salaries. A drop was noted in the school populations of all the towns. Fernie felt the pinch also, having sixty-eight men on relief.

The Hon. Charles Stewart visited the district and promised aid to the depressed coal industry. However, in quick succession Leitch Collieries and the Maple Leaf Mining Company ceased operation.

1. The principal's salary was reduced from \$1300 to \$1100 and the teachers' salaries from \$800 to \$650.

People who had but recently moved in from Lille or Hosmer were once again in search of homes. The name of the Davenport Coal Company at Burmis disappeared from the list of working mines in the report of the Alberta Mines Branch in 1915 and in 1916 its equipment was moved to a new mine at Wayne, Alberta. In spite of a terrible explosion,¹ one of the greatest in Canadian history, Hillcrest mine continued in operation, but the accident itself helped depress an already gloomy population.

When the war prosperity made itself felt in 1916, the demand for coal also went up, so that those companies which survived until that time became more or less permanent industries.

In 1911, the Canadian government, following an investigation, ordered the village of Frank moved from the shadow of Turtle Mountain. A good part of it had been moved before the mine company began to get into difficulties, so that today a sizable² village persists north of the railway. When the mine closed, there was no immediate exodus, for with Blairmore only one mile away and Bellevue but three, the men walked to work in these places and only gradually did the population disperse. The Canadian Pacific kept its roundhouse and engine sheds in Frank so that there was always a small population of railway workers. Many of the buildings were torn down or moved whole to neighboring towns, particularly Blairmore. The

1. See below p. 130.

2. The population of Frank in 1941 was 204.

great hotel owned by the coal company also declined in use when the vogue for sulphur baths passed and it served first as quarters for the 192nd Battalion and then as a hospital for tuberculous soldiers. The structure stood unused for a number of years and about 1928 it was torn down by Joe Michalsky, who built a number of houses from it. The same man purchased the brick from the coke ovens at the old smelter and used many of them to build the Polish hall in Coleman.

Passburg buildings were soon taken away, mostly to Bellevue, and today but one or two buildings remain. The mine plant was left for years as on the day of closing until the demand for scrap-iron became great enough to cause the material to be moved. The ruined coke ovens and a few gutted stone and concrete buildings are all that remain today.

Hosmer remained intact for a few years. Then, many of the houses were moved to Fernie. In 1922, John S. D'Appolonia and Alex. M. Morrison of Coleman bought a number of the mine cottages, sawed them in half, loaded them onto flat cars and shipped them to Coleman. They were reassembled along the street behind the main street, replastered, refinished outside, and then sold or rented at a good profit.

Lille remained a real ghost town for many years as it was difficult of access. When a flood washed out the railway bed in 1923, the only means of visiting the town was by a logging road

from Blairmore on the west side of Bluff Mountain. It was a favorite goal for hikers for years. Although some of the houses were taken away as soon as the mine closed, many buildings were left for many years. As late as 1930, the hotel still stood with its huge verandah sagging badly. The four-roomed school was still there with doors sagging, windows agape and pupils' excuse notes scattered all over the floor. The tipple and railway rolling stock remained, while in the level place where the cottages had stood, fire hydrants stuck up through the long grass marking the location of the streets. In 1950 almost everything had disappeared but the hydrants were still to be found lying in the grass, having rusted off at ground level.

About the time the first war began, a commission "to delimit the Boundary between the Provinces of Alberta and British Columbia" began its operations in the district. The commissioners, R. W. Cautley, J. N. Wallace and A. O. Wheeler, were required to make an accurate survey because in the area of Alberta west of the main range, the Tent Mountain Coal Company of Alberta was prospecting and its coal seams ran into those of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company along the boundary. The Crowsnest series of passes was examined carefully and many of the surface features renamed¹ or named for the first time. One rather interesting name was that of Andygood Creek, named after Andy Good, the proprietor

1. e.g. Mt. Tecumseh was changed to Mt. Phillipps.

of Crowsnest's only hotel since construction days. He was a colorful giant of a man who was widely known for his zoo of native animals, his guided hunting trips and his boast that rain falling on one side of his hotel roof ran into the Pacific, while that which fell on the other side ended up in the Atlantic. The combining of the two names into one word makes it conform with the Ottawa dictum that two word names were to be avoided. Another interesting point in the report of 1914 was the dispute as to whether the little lake in Phillipps Pass, which had no outlet other than a subterranean one to the Oldman Cave, was a watershed or not. The point was decided in favor of Alberta, proving that subterranean streams cannot be considered as watershed streams. The commissioners further noted that a road was being built around the south side of Crowsnest Lake to replace the one then going "over the summit" through Phillips Pass,¹ which usually became blocked by snow in the winter.

1. The commission actually gave this formerly nameless pass its present title.



Above. The sulphur springs at Frank as they are today.

Below. Meeting the train at Frank in the days before the large station was built.

Photo. F. Graham E. Gushul



CHAPTER 8
LIFE IN THE EARLY PERIOD

The year 1916 marks the beginning of a new era.

Old timers are those who can remember the prewar period of the founding of the town and the rugged life of the early days. It is difficult to picture adequately the roughness of life in the days when most of the towns were camps or little better. Occasional paragraphs in the newspapers give a glimpse of the differences between then and now. In 1900, the editor of the Fernie Free Press wrote an editorial condemning the action of Principal F. J. Watson, who sent home boys who came to school barefooted. He stated that that was the right of all schoolboys.

In the first issue of the Blairmore Enterprise in 1909, the following notice appeared:-

REWARD. Twenty-five dollars will be paid to anyone giving any information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the low-bred individuals who make a practice of spitting tobacco juice on notices that are posted around town in connection with municipal work.
L. Dutil Sec. of School Board.

The above examples are amusing but the picture one gains of the morals of the time is not. As early as 1899¹ illicit liquor trade was noted as being bad. Besides two hotels there were

1. Fernie Free Press March 9, 1899.

numerous "shack" bootleggers in operation from construction days.

Yet, in 1904, the same paper blamed the increase in crime over the "good old days" of '98 and '99 on the number of hotels (10) opened since that time. No hotel could be opened without the consent of the coal company but this was rarely withheld.

Breweries appeared in Fernie, Morrissey and Blairmore and others were planned. Speaking in 1910¹ of the early days an "old timer" said, "In those days the principal occupation in the Pass was dodging the police ... and furnishing coffin varnish for the thirsty inhabitants." The editor of the Frank Paper was appalled by the drunkenness in the town and suggested the abolition of the holiday on the day following payday. So much was spent on liquor, that merchants complained about the miners being unable to pay their bills. An early resident tells of the "mounties" in their red uniforms riding their horses down the main street of Frank and firing their revolvers into the air to break up the mob that poured from the saloons at closing time on paydays.

With the drinking went the "red light" district. These were more or less open and were constant targets of the clergy of the Pass towns. The Hosmer Times² records a strange incident. The "red light" district had been reopened. At once a public indignation meeting was called by ministers under the leadership of Rev. D. L.

1. Blairmore Enterprise 1910.
2. Hosmer Times March 31, 1910.

Gordon of Fernie. Arguments were heard on both sides and then the question was put to a vote. A slight majority was recorded in favor of the reopening. Mr. Gordon left the meeting in disgust.

At about the same time the ministers on the eastern slopes led a campaign to close the "disorderly houses" which had been established in "restricted districts", but with little success. It is small wonder that Ralph Connor, in his books, speaks of the ministers as "going up into the Pass" or "coming down from the Pass" as if it were a place that one entered and left as quickly as possible.

Linked with liquor is the question of the well known lawlessness which had been noted since the building of the railway. Undoubtedly the liquor trade, especially the illegal part, was at the back of most of this. In 1899 the Free Press complained of a shortage of constables. Following the murder of Constable Wilmett by an unknown assailant,¹ the Coleman Miner concluded that the Mounties had too much work and too little pay. The Alberta government was also blamed for paying too little to those conducting cases. The paper claimed that the prosecutors were incapable and a laughing stock. However that may be, bank messengers travelled armed, sometimes with a police escort. Mr. J. H. Farmer used to tell of standing by with revolvers ready as the

1. Solved by the confession of M. Jasbec in 1911.

tellers handed out the pay to the miners and of having to fire into the floor on one occasion in Lille to foil an attempt to steal the money being paid out to the workers. The bank staffs took regular target practice with revolvers.

Probably a more important factor in the lawlessness even than magisterial inefficiency was the very large proportion of single men, away from the restraint of family or village, who constantly drank and fought.¹ The non-British element, which has never experienced any prohibition movement, behaved similarly and for the same reasons. A great "stone and bottle" battle was noted in Coleman's Bushtown in 1908. Most of the major crimes of the district at this time can be traced to this wildness and excessive drinking.

The other pastimes which occupied the miners were bowling and pool and its related games. A considerable amount of gambling went on with these games as it does to the present day.

For those who wished it, there were many other forms of amusement. Hockey and football as well as baseball flourished right from the start. The first hockey game was played on January 21, 1901, when two Fernie teams clashed. Leagues were formed and each town at some time or other had its team declared "Champion of the Pass". Skating rinks appeared early. Fernie had

1. An influx of single men from Nova Scotia after 1945 produced a similar type of brawling.

a covered rink before the big fire of 1908 and by 1910 every town had at least an open air rink. The crowds followed their teams by sleigh to the nearer towns and by train at "club rates", often in special coaches over longer distances. The fanatical support of the home teams so noticeable today was even greater in the early days of heavy betting. Boxing matches with local champions were very popular at one time but now have practically vanished from the memory of all but a few of the older men.

A little slower to appear was curling, but Fernie had its "First Annual" bonspiel in 1910. This sport became very popular as the first generation grew a little older and is still a number one pastime. Football (soccer) came in with the British miners and was a tremendously popular sport as long as fresh material came over from Britain but almost disappeared when this stopped. The native born turned to hockey, which has remained the characteristic sport of the area.

Lodges took up the attention of many. The Oddfellows, Masons, Knights of Pythias and Eagles were particularly active. Fancy dress balls and masquerades both in halls and on ice were very popular. Almost all organizations had an annual ball to which many people went, usually in some gay costume. The Firemen's Ball seemed to be most popular. Whist-drives soon were organized and were a favorite Saturday night pleasure of the older folk for many years.

The custom of Charivari was also widespread but behavior at these functions became extremely bad. It was "positively obnoxious and nothing short of hoodlumism", one editor stated in 1907.¹

A nobler sport was that of horseracing. Each town had its racetrack and heavy betting led to the practice of "importing" better horses. The Pass Plate was called the "Classic Turf Event of Southern Alberta" in its 1907 advertisement. Blairmore's racetrack was spoiled when the mining company straightened the very crooked river in West Blairmore so that the stream ran right through the centre of the track. Coleman's racetrack was soon built over by the expansion of the town northwards.

The "opera" houses throughout the pass were the scenes of other entertainments -- the travelling shows with their plays and revues. Fernie was always a stopping point, while Frank's schoolhouse was used for these shows and was usually crowded. Coleman (1908), Blairmore (1910) and Hosmer (1910) were soon added to the list when they opened opera houses.

The churches also had their organizations and suppers which were very popular, but these were overshadowed by the great revival meetings which were common. A "vast throng" saw the evangelists off on the train at Fernie in 1909.

Very soon, signs could be noted of two phenomena which would destroy much of the entertainment mentioned, for the movies and the automobile began to appear. "Magnificent electrical representations of the latest tragedies" were shown for prices of ten, fifteen and twenty-five cents in Fernie in 1909. Movies were shown nightly for ten and fifteen cents in 1912 while early in the first war, the subscription price for a month was but fifty cents in Coleman. There were three movie houses in Fernie in 1914. By 1920 most theatres charged fifty cents a night with seventy-five cent admissions for special pictures.

In 1909, the Wolstenholme brothers brought a two-cylinder automobile into the Pass at Blairmore for milk delivery. In 1910, two other men had an auto livery, while in the same year Fernie passed a speed law for automobiles. In that year also a road was completed so that it was "possible" to motor from Fernie to Lethbridge and two years later a reasonably good road was opened. In 1913, the Mayor of Blairmore, H. E. Lyon, was fined for driving an auto without a licence.

The homes of the area were, on the whole, poor. With the exception of Fernie, which was forced to erect fireproof buildings and which had early installed a sewer system, the houses of the towns of the Pass were of wood, resting for the most part on wooden blocks, which made them easy to move when the mines closed down. The outdoor privy was the only "plumbing" in what

were called the miners' "cottages" and this is still true to a greater extent than most residents would wish. Only a few of the better houses had bathrooms and solid foundations. The areas occupied by the non-Anglo-Saxon group were often filthy. These thrifty people nearly always kept pigs or cows near the houses as they had in the old country, but as the houses were closer together in Canada, the results were unwholesome. The Free Press¹ complained of the crowded unsanitary conditions among the "Russians" and thought that some action should be taken to improve things. The situation was much the same in Bushtown in Coleman and the riverbottom at Bellevue until late in the 1920's. The "bachelors" who lived in these shacks often entertained their friends and in West Coleman a man of Slovak origin had asked some of his friends to come to dinner. As the guests entered the dwelling, they were greeted by a terrific explosion which spattered the partly cooked food all over them and blew them out of the house. No one was seriously hurt. In those days the miners looked after their own dynamite for blasting and as it was useless if it became wet it was usually kept in the oven. The host had forgotten to remove his dynamite before starting the fire.

The soft heart of the miner is also well known. It is not surprising to learn that when two nuns went through early in the century they made a fine collection for their charitable works. The

1. April 30, 1910. Actually there were very few Russians.

miners were irked to find somewhat later that the "nuns" had been two men who had found a profitable money-raising enterprise.

Fires were very common. The newspapers list a large number of hotel fires, while houses often burned in blocks.¹ Consequently the towns were very fire conscious. Fire brigades were organized and firehalls were among the first buildings that newly incorporated communities built. The firemen trained faithfully and often held firemen's sports days in which the main events were hose-laying races and ladder climbing events. These were sports highlights of the season and were very popular. Most of the souvenir editions of the newspapers proudly display photographs of new firehalls or fire brigades in action. Where there was no organized government, boards of trade were formed which dealt with such matters as getting together firemen and supplying them with hoses and other equipment. Most of the money from the popular Firemen's Balls was used to buy hoses and carts.

One feature of the towns which has since disappeared was the butcher chain stores of the 41 Ranch Company and P. Burns and Company. Many young people are at a loss when some older person refers to a butcher shop in Coleman as the "41 Meat Market", for it has not had that name for over thirty years. The sign still

1. There seems to have been a strange correlation between hotel fires and rumors of mines closing. Hotels usually burned about a day or two before the announcement of closing came.

remains on the wall of a store in Fernie but the building now houses a bakery. The P. Burns stable is used as a house in Coleman at the present time and is still not the least bit dingy in appearance.

one of the most important factors of the long and successful
life of the species is the ability to adapt to a variety of physical
environments. The species is well known for its adaptability
and its ability to survive in a wide range of environments, including



The "Gap". Turtle Mountain on left. The springs are across the railway just beyond the farthest railway cars.

Below. View of Frank looking north from the balcony of the bank. Taken after the landslide, this shows many buildings already moved north across the railway. Photo -- F.Graham-E. Gushul.



CHAPTER 9

THE PASS FROM WORLD WAR I TO THE DEPRESSION

By 1916, the rising demand for all goods, coupled with the increasing manpower shortage, made conditions much better in the mining industry. There was a series of short strikes by which wages were forced up until eventually they were about double what they had been before the war. The highest daily wage listed in the agreement following the 1911 strike was \$3.65 and boys' wages were a little over one dollar. In 1919 the wage scale graduated from \$7.50 for men who worked at the face to \$3.85 for boys. A further indication of prosperity was the reopening of the Maple Leaf mine under the name of the Mohawk Collieries.

The people of the Pass were much affected by the war, many men serving in the armed forces. The volunteers were largely of British, French and Belgian origin with a somewhat smaller proportion of other nationalities. This does not necessarily mean that the other groups were less patriotic but that many of those of Slavic origin were uncertain of their status. Some Poles and Ukrainians were considered Russians and therefore allies, while some of their friends, speaking the same languages were classed as Austrians and therefore enemy aliens. The local lack of knowledge about central European peoples confused things still further. Many people were arrested and interned, 306 persons being held in the Fernie-Michel area

alone.¹ In the Alberta part of the Pass the 192nd Battalion was formed which took over the Sanatorium Hotel in Frank as its headquarters. The equivalent unit in Fernie was the 107th East Kootenay Regiment from which drafts were sent to units on active service. All the activities associated with the war such as local Red Cross drives, knitting, sewing and raising money for war charities were as evident here as in any other part of Canada. There was very little shortage of consumer goods and taxes did not take any great proportion of the miners' wages. The number of casualties was not excessive and to most people the war seemed rather remote after the initial excitement had died down.

However, the one effect of the war which was felt was the epidemic of influenza in 1918. In November, the number of cases was so great that special "hospitals" were opened. In Coleman, the school was soon filled with the sick. In Fernie the Napanee Hotel and the Canadian Temperance Hotel were used to house the victims of the disease. The other towns were equally affected but the sick were generally cared for in their own homes. The influenza was much worse than the war because from two to three ² times as many people died of the sickness as were killed overseas.

Other things, considered by some as more important than the war, soon occupied the minds of many of the residents of the

1. Blairmore Enterprise, May 28, 1915.

2. A Coleman oldtimer stated that twenty-three died of the 'flu compared to about six or seven killed in action.

Pass, for, on June 30, 1916, the prohibition era commenced and until the early twenties, the Crow's Nest Pass became notorious for lawlessness throughout Canada. It served as a local example of the much larger crime wave of the United States.

When, in July, 1915, the majority in Alberta voted for prohibition, the whole Pass section of the Rocky Mountain constituency voted "wet". When the act prohibiting the sale of liquor was but one year old in 1917, the local newspapers were full of stories of raids on laundries, cafes and other business places by the police who were looking for bootleg whiskey. Poolrooms seemed to be particularly popular drinking places, perhaps because they were open so late. So notorious did the poolrooms become that the editor of the Coleman Bulletin wrote a strong editorial¹ about the abuse of the poolroom licences. In the same issue there were paid advertisements by four men who were applying for such licences. The present town has only two poolrooms for a larger population. One month later the same paper showed that prohibition worked little hardship on the population, for every month 1,500 to 2,000 packages of "joy juice"² passed through the Dominion Express office. No package contained less than a quart, so the total was greater than had been sold in the hotels in "wet" days.

1. Bulletin ; June 27, 1917.
2. The words are the editor's.

When the importation loophole was stopped by legislation in 1921, other means were found. Shacks were built back in the hills for the making of "moonshine" but most of the supply for the thirsty populace came through other channels. Packtrains came over the little used mountain trails. Doctors were supplied with books of special prescription forms for liquor for medicinal purposes and few failed to use all the blanks. A veritable parade trooped into the drugstores¹ near the end of every month. The established liquor interests did not lose touch with the business. Fernie became the centre of supply not only for the Albertans but also for the apparently thirstier neighbour to the south -- the United States. The traffic grew to such proportions and affected so many people that the details of the methods used cannot be discussed at the present time without embarrassing many people still living in the area. Almost everybody needed for the conveying and marketing of liquor seems to have cooperated and there is little doubt that some members of the police forces were involved.

Crime, for which the area had always been known,² now became much more sinister. It could not now be put down to mere drinking or lack of community restraint. It became a matter of organized gangs, sometimes with a fierce rivalry

1. The writer worked in a drugstore at the time.
2. See below p. 86.

developing in the rush to get rich quickly. Gangs often informed on one another so that the police made great hauls when tipped off. The possibility of good detective work must not be overlooked of course.

The first really sensational crime was a train hold-up at Sentinel on August 2, 1920.¹ Local tradition has it that the hold-up men had thought that "Emperor" Emilio Picariello, the best known liquor dealer in the Pass, was on the train. The three men involved were Tom Bassoff, George Arkoff and Aubey Auloff, men originally from Trans-Caucasian Russia. They were disappointed because "Pic" was not on the train and got a very little money. Five days later the police were told that two of the men were in a cafe in Bellevue. Three policemen entered the restaurant but in the shooting which followed, Constable Bailey of the Alberta Provincial Police and Constable Usher of the R. C. M. P. were killed. They had succeeded in killing Arkoff but Bassoff escaped with a slight wound. He was later picked up near Pincher, tried, and hanged on December 22. Auloff was arrested a few years later at Butte, Montana, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He died within a few months of silicosis. Though revolvers had rarely been seen in the Pass, these men were heavily armed, Bassoff carrying two pistols. This indicates that crime had become well organized and that arms to carry out the deeds were readily available.

1. Provincial Police Report, 1920. Alberta Sessional Papers.

There were other crimes, usually knifings or bludgeonings to replace the "stone and bottle fights" of older times. However, it remained for Picariello himself to bring the whole crime wave to its peak. In 1914, in the advertisements in the Fernie Free Press, Picariello is seen as a respectable businessman, who owned a macaroni factory and also manufactured and sold cigars. Seven years later he had moved to Blairmore, was the owner of the Alberta Hotel and did an extensive trade in liquor both as a legitimate importer and as a supplier of bootleggers. He still had connections in Fernie and received much of his contraband from that point. He was considered to be very rich, owning a number of the fastest cars available and hiring a mechanic to keep the automobiles in first class condition.

In September 1922, one of these cars had brought in a big load of whiskey from Fernie but the police came to know of it and planned to raid the hotel. Constable Steve Lawson of the A. P. P. had apparently been sent back to Coleman on a train that was just leaving Blairmore in case an attempt should be made to run the liquor back to British Columbia. When Steve Picariello, Emilio's son, came driving his car at full speed along the Coleman's main street, Lawson shouted a warning and then fired his revolver. The car continued on its way and Steve arrived at Michel with merely a bruised finger. The distorted stories which reached the father caused him to come, accompanied by a young woman, to Lawson's

house in Coleman just at sunset and to shoot the constable as he stepped towards the car.

Picariello and the woman, Florence Lassandro, were arrested, tried and executed in 1923. The case shocked the whole country, for it seemed that Alberta had suddenly copied the worst features of American gangsterism. This is the crime most people think of when reference is made to the prohibition era in Alberta. The two sensational breaches of the law coming so closely together have fixed in the minds of people the impression of extreme lawlessness being prevalent in the Pass even though there has been very little of a criminal nature in the area that could not have been duplicated in half a dozen other places with an equal population. The writer believes that the passing of the Alberta Liquor Act in 1924 was due in a large measure to events in that small area in south-western Alberta.

For some time after the conviction of Picariello, the police maintained road barriers to stop all road traffic, first at a narrow spot through the volcanic ridge at Star Creek, a mile and a half west of Coleman and later at Coleman's western limits. Even with these precautions, there was no shortage of liquor. A cartoon in the Calgary Eye-Opener at the time made sport of the whole barrier idea by showing two policemen complaining about the lack of business while packmules were shown going up and down the hills in all directions. Actually the liquor came in with much less

difficulty than that. The hamlet of Crowsnest became a favorite rendezvous of Pass drinkers and because of the somewhat different serving hours in British Columbia from those of Alberta, it has remained a favorite haunt.

Although one might conclude that the Crow's Nest towns were very dangerous places in which to live at that time, actually the reverse was true. There was much less public drunkenness than there is today because most of the drinking was done in secret and only those taking part in it became involved in the fights. For most of the people, the bootlegging, raids and fines were things that one read about in the papers. An interesting case that gained public attention was one in which a man charged another with stealing liquor from his basement. The judge dismissed the case stating that one cannot steal what a person does not, according to law, possess.

Some of the younger people started carrying metal pocket flasks -- even, occasionally, to school, but this was more in imitation of the American "flaming youth" as it was depicted in the movies. After 1924, bootlegging gradually decreased until it amounted to little more than a supply for after-hours drinking or in gambling houses and houses of ill fame.

The second building boom in the history of the Pass took place in the immediate post-war period. Although in 1920 the mining companies went out searching for men and in some cases paid their

transportation to the mines, by 1921 there was some difficulty in obtaining work even for experienced miners. However, in spite of this there was reasonably regular work so that there was a rather prosperous period in the early 'twenties. Except for the One Big Union strike in 1919, there was no real bitterness¹ in any of the strikes which generally started in the spring, lasted through the summer and ended in the early autumn. The men would go off and obtain work on the farms, stay at home and hunt and fish² or work on their homes. If the strikes lasted long enough many would return to the prairies to help with the harvest.

In the strike of 1922 many new houses were built or moved in from the ghost towns, and more important still, the shacks were enlarged into decent houses. The miners, who were by this time mostly married men with families, felt that there was a reasonable amount of permanence in the mining towns. So, houses were jacked up from their rotten wooden supports, basements were excavated and concrete poured. An increasing number of furnaces appeared in the new basements replacing the old heaters. Bathrooms in most of the towns require cesspool drainage and septic tanks which were dug by the men themselves during these slack periods.

1. The issues were serious, but there was little tendency to the violence that had marred the 1911 strike.
2. Always very popular pastimes in the Pass.

However, the number installed in the early twenties was rather small. Any new houses in this period were placed on concrete blocks or foundations.

The building of schools, which had stopped in the 1914 depression and during the war, now started again. Bellevue enlarged its school and built another at Maple Leaf. Hillcrest also built a new school and Blairmore added to its central school. A small school was erected in West Blairmore, by the West Canadian Company, which was taken over by the school board at a later date. Coleman built its Cameron school in 1920 and two years later attached two more rooms to the central school. Three neighboring houses were purchased later and turned into classrooms. Fernie opened its large school in 1923 and near the end of the period of prosperity in 1928, Michel-Natal built its greystone school.

In 1922, the East Kootenay Power Company put through a line bringing hydro-electric power to the mines and towns. Some communities such as Coleman, which had been using 220 volt circuits changed over to the standard 110 volt wiring. The mines took such large quantities of power that the company built a coal-burning plant at Crowsnest Lake in 1927 as an emergency source of power for times of low water, but it was soon running all year round to supply the demand.

Not many new business establishments were built although in Blairmore a series of fires swept through a large number of the

two-story shops and these were replaced by the one-story brick buildings which give Blairmore its distinctive appearance. New hotels appeared in the Alberta towns as the new Liquor Act called for certain high standards before licences could be issued. The Grand Union Hotel was built in Coleman, the Greenhill Hotel was built by the West Canadian Collieries Company in Blairmore and the Bellevue Inn was rebuilt. Only one hotel, the Venezia in Natal, was erected on the British Columbia side, for Fernie had a surplus of such buildings from the boom of 1908.

Another sort of building that was constructed at the Alberta end made quite a change in sports in the Pass. First, Bellevue in 1922, and then Blairmore and Coleman in 1923, raised money by popular subscription and built large ice arenas which ushered in the era of "big-time" hockey. Fernie's closed-in ice sheet was rather small, and Michel-Natal did not build a covered rink at all. Thus, with one exception, hockey was a sport that was entirely Albertan. The exception was Fernie's famous women's hockey teams particularly the "Swastikas" which gave their town a great deal of publicity. However, the imported teams of the eastern slopes made the names of Bellevue, Blairmore and Coleman well known to all who were interested in sport.

The teams were supported with tremendous enthusiasm, while the coal companies supplied "jobs" for the players, who were all "amateurs".¹ Although never winning national honors,

1. Both words in quotation marks are highly inaccurate.

teams from the Pass won western and provincial championships on a number of occasions. The people of Corbin and Michel flocked to the Alberta hockey games while the Fernie residents showed more interest in the fortunes of the Kimberley teams. The importance of this hockey must not be underestimated, for losses would precipitate large scale battles and cast a pall of gloom over the losing town for days. Victories would make the townsfolk delirious with delight.

The quality of the hockey was good and many major league stars first scintillated on Crow's Nest Pass ice. However, the area was really too small to finance such enterprises adequately so there were often lulls in hockey after splurges had piled up hopeless debts. In these periods the local boys would gradually work up teams of good calibre which would take the place temporarily of the higher priced senior teams. Blairmore and Coleman developed several good intermediate teams which won provincial and western championships. Generally the quality of the teams was a measure of the prosperity of the district.

Fernie and Michel continued with football and baseball, but Michel turned to basketball for a winter sport, using the abandoned Great Northern Railway station for a hall. Fernie supplied the only competition, for the Alberta towns either had no suitable halls or the hockey fever was too strong to allow any other sport to develop. When the Knights of Columbus took over

the Opera House in Blairmore and renamed it the Columbus Hall, Father Harrington, the local priest was able to develop quite an interest in basketball on into the depression years.

In 1922, when the Canadian Pacific Railway closed its mine at Bankhead, many of the miners and their families moved into the Crow's Nest Pass towns, most of them becoming permanent residents. This was the last displacement of population to have any notable effect on the towns.¹

The automobile became increasingly important during this period and with the opening of a new road out of Corbin in 1928, that town took a more active part in the life of the Pass. In 1921, British Columbia changed its highway act so that vehicles in that province would keep to the right as those of Alberta did. Accidents had been frequent along the narrow shelves of the British Columbia side of the Pass because of the confusion arising from the different provincial road rules. From this time on, every period of regular work would bring forth a flood of new cars. The tremendous optimism of the miners was such that a period of good "pays"² following long period of very low "pays" would be all that was necessary to bring about an increase in the purchase of automobiles.

1. The closing of Corbin and Hillcrest mines did not have any noticeable effect on the population of the other towns.
2. Local term for the amount of money received on a payday. Miners' activities are greatly influenced by paydays so that these are often used to indicate periods of time.

CHAPTER 10

THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II

The mining industry had been weakening for a year or two before the great depression following October, 1929, began. In 1926, the Great Northern Railway, which had been a heavy buyer of Fernie coal and which had been experimenting with oil-burning engines, decided to abandon its line from Elko to Michel. They entered into a contract with the Crow's Nest Southern Railway, a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific, for the joint use of trackage from Elko to Fernie. The Great Northern line had been losing money on operations and, when the depression was deepest, in 1934, it was decided to abandon the whole railway from Elko to Rexford, Montana. The removal of steel was completed by 1936. This loss of a main market explains why Fernie suffered so severely during the thirties.

The Canadian Pacific had been cutting down on its coal purchases as did the smelters, which suffered from the prevailing low prices for base metals. The increase in the use of oil for fuel and the development of hydro-electric power probably caused a decrease in coal purchases, but no one was sure of the cause. The British Columbia Department of Mines blamed the poor prairie wheat crop for the drop in coal sales in 1929. When the effects of the depression began to be felt, the miners were already down to a few shifts a week. By 1932, the mines were often working but one shift

a week or three shifts in two weeks. For many of the contract miners the paucity of shifts was not such a great handicap, for if they had reasonably good "places"¹ they could often get by. The younger men were on "company shifts" which paid from \$4.45 to \$4.95 per day. This meant thirty to forty dollars per month for these men many of whom were married. There was no hope of them ever becoming diggers because there were more than enough qualified miners. Even the actual number of days the mines operated, does not give a complete picture because all men were not called out on all working days as a "stagger" system was devised to spread the employment more evenly and to avoid laying off any more men. The situation became such that older men continued to work, while the young men had no jobs at all. Many of the youths reached their twenties without having worked a day, a condition which made many of them an easy prey to radicalism. With the young married men barely able to keep their families alive and older men forced to work to support their grown-up sons and daughters, it is little wonder that the communists found fertile ground for their propaganda.

The chief agent of communism was an organizer who took the name of Harvey Murphy.² Taking advantage of the weakness of

1. The section of a mine allotted to a group of miners is called their "place".
2. His real name is not immediately available, but it is a name of central European origin.

the unions, which, since 1924, had been mere local unions as far as wage contracts were concerned, Murphy was soon in control. Through his Workers' Unity League, which promised large union strength again, he was able to oust the executive of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada and replace it with men of his own choosing.

The Soviet Union and its successes now became the main theme. At miners' and public meetings the Russian experiment was held up as the shining example. Although the men in general were not communistic and disavowed any Russian affiliations, the terminology was definitely that of communism. "Workers" slates were put up and many candidates were elected to school boards and town councils. Coleman and Bellevue had communist members on their school boards. Blairmore elected a "Workers" council and gained nationwide notice by renaming its main street "Tim Buck Boulevard"¹ after the national secretary of the Communist party and installing a shower in the school basement which was called the "Tim Buck Baths". All occasions called forth "mass meetings" or "demonstrations" of solidarity. Parades were held and soviet-style banners carried. All were encouraged to give speeches which were liberally sprinkled with party line phrases and ideas. Often twenty-four hour sympathy or protest strikes were

1. The rebuilt street had light poles and grass plots down the centre of the street, which have since been removed. See McLean's Magazine, April 15, 1935.

called, with picket lines to turn back any who attempted to go to work. These strikes were more annoying than dangerous as so few shifts were worked in any case that each strike merely postponed the day's work.

The big strike called in February, 1932, will serve to show how serious the situation became. Coleman, Blairmore and Bellevue came out chiefly for union recognition. Many miners, particularly in Coleman and Bellevue, were opposed to the action of the union. The number who did not support the union in Blairmore was too small to have much influence, but the men in the other towns were able to make their ideas known. They were mostly men who had favoured the defeated executive of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada against the Unity League. Known as the Moderates in the press, they were anything but that in their opposition to Murphy. On May 2, and 3, a group of seventy men attempted to return to work under police protection.² The striking miners opposed this and recruited pickets from the other towns, many of them women. When the men fought to get through the lines, the struggle was frightful, especially with the women screaming and clawing at the "strikebreakers". So serious was this clash that the attempt was called off as the company and police feared "another Estevan".¹

1. Lethbridge Herald, Sept. 7, 1932. In just such a clash in Estevan, Saskatchewan, a short time before, three strikers and a police officer were killed.
2. At the Bellevue mine of the West Canadian Collieries Limited.

On May 26, in Coleman, the moderate group gained enough power to defeat a motion in a union meeting in the Miners' Hall (Opera House) and the meeting broke up in a terrific fist fight. The Coleman miners returned to work but the discrimination was the greatest ever seen in the Pass. Anyone who was suspected by the companies of favouring communism was not rehired. All members of the Ukrainian Farmer-Labor organization were included in this group. There was much unfairness, for many were rehired who should not have been and many were jobless who had had little to do with union activities.

The strike dragged on in Bellevue and Blairmore until September 7. Most of the trouble was at Bellevue, for the Moderates continued active there. They booed Murphy and Murphy's supporters retaliated by booing and shouting whenever the Moderates met. Every tactic known to the communists was used. Women were organized, a Youth Section was formed and even the children took part in the parades. One of the dailies reported a Youth Section band of boys singing to the tune of *Mademoiselle from Armentières*,

"The police are having a ---- of a time
Taking the scabs up to the mine." (1)

Little children carried banners with signs such as "Down With Yellow Scabs". Violence again flared up when the miners attempted to stop the firebosses producing coal for sale, which was

not part of their normal work. Nearly seventy people were arrested on various charges, including assault.

After seven months, following conferences between Premier Brownlee and the parties involved, the strike was settled without discrimination or ousting of the union. The miners protested all through this period that they were not "reds" but workers fighting for a decent living.

There had been opposition to the communists all along. The newspapers, especially the Coleman Journal, kept up a biting attack on Murphy, who called the weekly, "Halliwell's dirty yellow scandal sheet". Coleman people formed a Citizens' League which put on a tremendous campaign and succeeded in defeating the communist supported candidate for mayor in one of the most exciting civic elections ever held in the town. Crowds thronged the fire hall until the ballots had been counted to find out who had won. This was something that had never been experienced before and has not occurred since.

An organizer of the Ku Klux Klan appeared in the Pass, but apart from a "fiery cross" which burned on a hill south of Coleman one evening, there was very little other evidence of Klan activity. In any case it did not have much effect on the activities of Harvey Murphy,¹ for in 1934 he turned his attention

1. John Hladun in "They Taught Me Treason" (McLean's Magazine, Toronto, Oct. - Nov. 1947) tells how he and Murphy operated in the area.

to Corbin, whose mines had been working more regularly than those of the other towns. Because of frequent fires in the underground workings, the company had had difficulty in keeping the mines safe enough for the men to work in. So, they attempted, with trucks and steam-shovels, to work the "Big Showing" as a strip mine. With the same zeal as early weavers destroyed the job-taking textile machines, the enraged "workers and their wives"¹ stopped the trucks and manhandled the drivers. This action caused the company to suspend operations early in 1935, leaving the whole town without means of support. For some time the people lived in their town on relief as there was little work available in the other mines of the area. Gradually, the people moved away, very many of them to the west coast and other occupations. Today, very little is left of Corbin and but one man lives there eking out a precarious living with a store that serves the truck drivers who occasionally haul coal from the "Big Showing".

Fernie was hard hit by the depression and Coal Creek mines, with greatly reduced crews, worked but 77 days in 1932, 90 in 1933 and an average of 150 days in the next three years. The people and the coal company appealed to the C. P. R. to give some of its coal orders to Fernie. The railway company replied

1. Many of the pickets were the people who had appeared in the same role in Bellevue in 1932.

that its locomotives were designed to use the coal of the Alberta side of the Pass and could not use that of Fernie.¹ Michel with its high grade coal and its coke production had more employment than Coal Creek, never having fewer than 159 and always over 200 days from 1933 onwards. Consequently, when practically the whole of Fernie was on relief, Michel merely suffered hard times.

In August, 1932, Fernie called its city employees together to arrange lowering of salaries to save the city \$217 a month and at the same time Mayor Douglas announced that all relief work would cease because of lack of funds. The bank promised to finance the city until December but was uncertain whether it could carry on beyond that date. The province of British Columbia finally had to come to the aid of the city. In 1933, a commissioner, J. V. Fisher, was put in charge and he remained in control until 1945 when a council was again elected. Thomas Uphill who has been M. L. A. for the district since 1920 has acted as mayor from that time until the present.

In the other towns, in addition to those already jobless, the breaking of the strike produced much greater numbers of unemployed who had not been rehired by the companies. The councils

1. The C. P. R. claimed that the Fernie coal had a low clinker point and was not suitable. The railway used a great deal of Fernie coal during the wartime shortage without much complaint.

soon realized that they could not cope with the situation, and called on their respective provincial governments for assistance. Road-building projects supplied work and many sections of the highway were straightened or re-routed. Several curves were cut out near Michel, the rocky shelf near Crowsnest was widened, a piece near Coleman was straightened and a whole new section was built between Blairmore and Frank eliminating one bridge with its dangerous approaches. All this work was done with picks, shovels and wheelbarrows on the basis of about ten days a month to each man.

When the Federal government entered the picture, work camps were built and major projects were undertaken. An emergency landing field for aeroplanes was built just west of Coleman by digging boulders from a rocky field and wheeling them away in wheelbarrows. Other camps, located near Michel, Fernie and Elko continued the roadwork on a larger scale. Two camps at Bellevue and Frank housed the men who built a new road through the Frank Slide. Hand drilling and blasting supplemented the wheelbarrows and picks of the workers. The men were given their board and clothing and about twenty cents a day. Drillers received a dollar a day and the work was eagerly sought by the young men, many of whom were working for the first time.

The communists violently opposed such regimentation and did everything possible to discredit the whole scheme. However,

their arguments were of no avail and the camps continued until improving conditions caused the absorption of the men into the mining industry. The married men, working under provincial and town relief schemes, did not stay at the camps.

In the meantime, Coleman began to manufacture coke in a few ovens in 1932 and by 1933 the full battery was in operation to supply the Trail smelter. It had been rumoured that the Canadian Pacific had bought a dominant interest in the Coleman mines to control the coke output for its smelters.¹ This was not so, but the two companies were operated under the same management in order to secure greater economy. The addition of the coke ovens meant an extra shift a week for the miners besides supplying work for many hands at the coke ovens. This made Coleman the first town to shake off the effects of the depression and the other towns followed as the market for base metals expanded and business took a swing upwards. Coal Creek was the exception, not working 200 days a year until 1941.

The depression period had a curious effect upon the people of the Pass. There was so little moving around that everyone came to know everyone else and if anyone moved, it was to other mining towns such as Drumheller, Lethbridge, Canmore, Nordegg or Cadomin.

1. The Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company, a Canadian Pacific subsidiary actually took over the mines in Coleman together with the Mohawk Company of Bellevue to form Coleman Collieries Ltd. in 1951.

This static condition developed an insularity in the generation growing up which was almost like that of remote hill settlements of the United States. The young people were convinced that their towns were the centre of the world and that the rest of civilization surrounded them like a fringe. When work became more plentiful, there was an epidemic of marriages, nearly always to people from the neighboring towns.

Even the crime of the period took a different turn. There were few major infractions but an unusual number of juvenile breakings and enterings. Coleman, Blairmore and Bellevue were equally affected by candy store, hardware and railway car burglaries and for several years in the early thirties "led" the province in this regard. There were two possible reasons for this. One was the general shortage of spending money for children. The other was the peculiar reaction of some of the second generation children against parental restraint. The children of non-English¹ speaking parents in their eagerness to be recognized as real Canadians often discarded more of the ideals of their parents than was good for them. They often defied their parents who in turn were baffled by the way children behaved "in this country". In a number of cases this defiance ended in clashes with the law.² When these children grew up they stood

1. There is no implication that only children of non-English speaking parents were involved.
2. The contemptuous term "Bohunk" (Bohonk" in the Pass) was much more frequently used thirty and more years ago than it is today. Sensitive children would do almost anything to avoid being called that name.

for no such nonsense from their children for they were well aware of what was required of Canadian children in regard to respect for parents and for law. Of course there is no shortage of pocket money in the Pass at the present time either.

It is worth noting that the people did not quickly recover their optimism about the future of the mines and very little public building went on. Coleman, in 1938, was practically forced to build another school but even the speeches at the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone warned against building such an expensive building (estimated cost -- \$30,000) in any place as insecure as a mining town. Blairmore built itself a fine technical school only to have it burn down when it was almost completed, never to be rebuilt. Fernie also built itself a "tech" in 1937 which was modest compared to what early Fernie residents might have built.

The building of homes was resumed in the period just before the war and although no mortgages could be obtained in the mining area, the Home Improvement Plan loans were available and many houses were improved by this means. Nearly all the new houses were of bungalow style and cost between two and three thousand dollars. However the number built was small compared with that of the boom in the twenties.

The strange thing about the whole depression was that only one mine closed down in the period and that (at Corbin)

was certainly not caused by a lack of orders. However, when the slump seemed to be over in 1939, Hillcrest Mines ceased operations and went into receivership. The mine surface plant was removed and the Mohawk Coal Company took over the land and worked it from their side of the seam as the Hillcrest-Mohawk Collieries.

The people of Hillcrest remained in their town. The men were soon at work in neighboring towns to which they were transported by bus. The little hamlet is far from being a ghost town for very few houses are empty. Bellevue School District took over the school which now operates as part of the Bellevue-Hillcrest School District.

The Second World War stimulated the demand for coal and shortly the mines were working more regularly and wages rose. At first the wages were adjusted by mutual agreement in relation to the government cost-of-living index but soon a series of strategic strikes, some of them in defiance of the law (as in 1943), caused wages to rise to the point where the common laborer (the lowest paid employee) was earning \$10.07 a day and the work week was reduced to five days.

Men flocked to join the forces and as the old system of local recruiting had been abandoned, the men served in the regiments of their military districts at Vancouver or Calgary. Quite a large number served as engineers, the branch for which

they were best suited. Later, the younger men joined the navy and airforce.

The demand for coal was very great and as the men went away, a shortage was soon noted so that miners were "frozen" in their jobs and eventually no miners were called up under the provisions of the National Resources Mobilization Act. Many actually returned from the services to the mines on special miners' leaves.

There was very little panic or internment and little but support for the war effort. When a shortage of beer developed there was a cry of "No Beer -- No Bonds" but it was not serious, for all bond drives were well organized and tremendously successful, always surpassing the quotas. The communists opposed the war at first by surreptitiously distributing pamphlets calling on the workers to boycott the "imperialistic" war but when Russia was attacked they were in the van in promoting the war effort. Russian films were shown and received with great enthusiasm. When Russia cried for a second front, the Pass communists demanded a second front. After the war, a little Russian town was "adopted" by the Alberta Pass towns to aid it in its rehabilitation. However, the communists did not increase their following to any extent and were far from the powerful influence they had been in 1932.

The attitude of the Pass during the war may be judged by its record. Large numbers served in all forces even though

they might have remained in jobs classed as essential. The bond drives were well supported and always oversubscribed, even when the quota was raised each time. The members of the Canadian Legion, remembering their own plight in the first war, worked diligently and collected large sums of money, usually at the banks on paydays, to send cigarettes monthly to the boys overseas.¹ Even the heavy taxation and rationing were taken as well as in most parts of Canada although some absenteeism was noted when it was considered that money earned above a certain amount would be taxed away.

War casualties were numerous, but as in many other areas they were among the young boys who joined up a year or two after the beginning of the war. This was particularly true in regard to those who joined the airforce but applied to the army as well. Those men who enlisted early in the war were stationed in Britain and did not see action until the invasion of Italy. Many Pass servicemen were decorated for gallantry and their exploits were given wide publicity.

1. The number of men served averaged from 125 to 200 in the Alberta towns. The B. C. figures were not obtainable but should be proportional.

CHAPTER 11
ACCIDENTS AND CATASTROPHES

Almost every conceivable type of disaster seems to have occurred in the Crow's Nest Pass. For these, both nature and man must share responsibility. There have been avalanches, landslides, mudslides and floods. There have been forest fires and other conflagrations and, in addition, numerous mine explosions.

In a narrow valley such as that of the Crow's Nest Pass, a heavy fall of snow, especially if accompanied by any great wind, can isolate the towns completely. The communities live from hand to mouth so that if the railways, (and in later years the roads), become blocked, there will be no fresh food, particularly meat, within two days. This is particularly true of the eastern towns which have no farms near them. Fernie, however, has by far the most snow and on several occasions food supplies have run a little low. In 1911,¹ for instance, Canadian Pacific trains were stranded in Fernie and it cost the railway company five hundred dollars a day to feed the passengers. Food was getting scarce before relief trains got through. However, there was no danger of starvation at this time for a herd of elk was stranded in the valley also. One of the animals died from the effects of

1. Called "the heaviest snowfall in living memory" by the Free Press. February 11, 1911.

running away from the people who came out to see the creatures after whom the valley had been named. The winter of 1949-50 brought record snowfalls, deeper than anyone in the Alberta section could remember, but it was pointed out in Fernie that the total snowfall of fifteen feet six inches was still sixteen inches less than the snowfall of 1915-16.¹

The railway companies and the highway departments of the two provinces have always been able to stave off any real suffering, but, paradoxically, the heavy snows have frequently caused some concern because of the difficulty of getting coal to the homes with four or five feet of snow blocking the alleys. The miners have always been improvident in laying in stocks of coal for the winter.

The heavy snowfalls are the cause of the spring floods, but fortunately not many of the floods have occurred in the years of heaviest snow. The flooding results rather from conditions in the spring which cause a large amount of snow to melt at once. In 1897, Superintendent Steele² reported floods causing heavy damage in the Pass. In June, 1899, the Elk River wrecked the Canadian Pacific sawmill. Another flood was reported in 1909 but with less damage. On the whole, the western side has not suffered so much from floods as has the eastern side. Even the great flood of 1948 which inundated parts of Michel and Fernie,

1. From records kept by the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company.
2. S. B. Steele, op. cit. p. 260.

wreaked most of its damage by washing away bridges, which, according to residents who appreciate the fine bridges that were built to replace the old, was hardly a great catastrophe.

However, Coleman, Blairmore, Frank and the Bellevue Riverbottom¹ are directly in the path of a rising Crowsnest River, for the land upon which they are built was the slough which served as a bull pasture sixty years ago. Consequently, inundations are more numerous and damaging in these towns. Bellevue proper and Hillcrest have been safe on their lofty eminences. In 1908 and again in 1909, the road between Blairmore and Coleman was impassable for several weeks, houses in Frank being flooded at the same time.

However, no serious floods occurred until 1923. On May 31, long after the snow had left the valley and the trees were in leaf, a warm two-day rain, following a cool spring, turned every creek into a torrent. Coleman was the worst hit town, for its two creeks came from the north around Crowsnest Mountain, which had been swept by forest fires the two previous summers. McGillivray Creek overflowed its culverts and made West Coleman and Italian Town into two lakes, while Nez Perce Creek swept through the heart of the town, flooding every building in its path. The river, aided by the creeks, washed away railway tracks, dropping loaded boxcars into the river bed. The East Coleman

1. Local name for flats along a river in a narrow valley.

bridge collapsed and one home was swept out into mid-stream. Lyon and York Creeks at Blairmore and Gold Creek at Frank also did considerable damage, flooding the lower portions of the towns and washing out bridges and railway tracks. Bellevue's low section was flooded and highway bridges were washed away. The railway bridges resisted the force of the waters better but were greatly weakened. Crowsnest (Glacier) Creek washed out a long section of track and the Pass was isolated as effectively as by any winter snowstorm. There were few casualties, no one in the Pass proper losing his life. The homeless were cared for by the more fortunate residents of the towns concerned until the receding waters allowed them to return to their homes.

The Alberta¹ government and the councils of the towns did a great deal of work following the flood by dredging and cribbing the creeks and river and replacing the bridges with stronger structures. However, nothing further was done so that when nineteen years elapsed with no floods, conditions were pretty much the same as they had been in 1923.

In 1942, following a backward spring that had melted very little snow in the hills, a warm rain caused the rivers and creeks to overflow again but this time at the beginning of May (May 2). There had been no forest fires in the few years preceding, so all creeks were equally affected. Blairmore seemed

1. The floods of 1923 and 1942 did not affect the western slopes to any extent.

to bear the brunt of this flood but the same areas in Coleman were again lakes -- Italian Town (Second Street) and West Coleman. The dredging following the flood of 1923 prevented as much damage in Bushtown (East Coleman).

York and Lyon Creeks in Blairmore rushed down with tremendous force, washing out their banks, undermining houses and taking out culverts and bridges. The low places were flooded and basements were filled by water rising through the subsoil. A coal refuse dump on the Greenhill mine was practically washed away. The deposits from this waste heap were blamed by many residents for the way in which the water spread through West Blairmore. The western end of the village of Frank and the area around Turtle Mountain Playground were flooded and Gold Creek again blocked its culvert and washed across the railway.

Following this occurrence more work was done to prevent damage from subsequent high water. The Alberta government sent in power machinery to dredge the river through Frank and Blairmore. Government engineers found a way to allow the overflow of McGillivray Creek to pass beneath the railway without flooding West Coleman. The town councils of all towns were alert after 1942, clearing out culverts every spring before the flood waters arrived, so that when the third flood came in the middle of May, 1948,¹

1. This corresponds to the great Fraser River flood which did so much damage in British Columbia.

the work crews were able to prevent any extensive inundation. The river was very high and two small bridges were washed out in Blairmore while a railway bridge collapsed near Burmis causing a freight train to drop into the gully killing two of the crew. The only indication that this was as great a run-off as in the previous floods was the track washout near the plant of the Summit Lime Works, where Crowsnest (Glacier) Creek did more damage to the railway than in any previous flood. The great snowfall of 1949-50 which had caused much trepidation, ran off without any trace of flooding.

If the British Columbia side of the Pass was not so liable to flooding, heavy rains periodically brought on another phenomenon -- the mudslide. The heavy clays on the hillsides have often oozed down when sodden with rain, blocking roads and railways. When Fernie's business section burned in April, 1904, the city was isolated for a day or two because of slides along the railway. Another started down on part of Fernie in 1914 but stopped just short of the first houses. As recently as 1950, the highways were blocked for a day or two by sliding mud. Avalanches are uncommon in this area but in December, 1912, a mass of rock and snow slid down at Coal Creek, damaging mine property and killing six men.

Forest fires have been a menace to the whole area until quite recently. Half of Michel was destroyed in 1902 by a fire

started by careless workmen. In 1904, after Fernie's first city fire, a forest fire, following a three month dry spell, spread from the Great Northern Railway right-of-way and ravaged the whole Elk Valley. This fire raged through the hills around Michel and the Loop to Crowsnest and into Alberta. The 1908 fire which destroyed Fernie, also burned a few houses at Hosmer and wiped out the sawmill hamlet of Sparwood. In 1910, the whole area north of Blairmore and Coleman was devastated by a fire while another blaze raged near Passburg and Burmis. 1920 and 1921 saw fires sweep across from north of Michel through Deadman Gap and rage around the foot of Crowsnest Mountain. These fires were a contributing factor in the closing of MacLaren's sawmill, which had stood between Blairmore and Coleman since the railway had been built. Corbin was threatened by fire about 1930 and numerous fires occurred in the depression years, possibly set to obtain the work which resulted from the firefighting. Most of the fires in the last twenty years¹ have been brought under control quickly because of the determined efforts of Canadian and provincial governments to protect the watersheds which supply the irrigation water for the prairies. The highway from Coleman north to Kananaskis was built by the Eastern Slopes Conservation Board in 1949 and 1950 for purposes of fire protection in the Crowsnest and Bow River forest reserves along the Crowsnest trough.

1. Alberta's Forestry Branch reports no major fires since 1937.

Industrial fatalities are another common factor in Crow's Nest Pass towns. Only Blairmore, of all the towns remaining after the depression of 1914, has escaped a major disaster. The first great explosion was at Coal Creek on May 22, 1902, in the "deeps"¹ of No. 2 mine. Over 125 men were killed.² This is listed in miners' handbooks as one of the great mining catastrophes of the world but very few people in the Pass today are aware that it occurred. Even people who worked in Fernie at the time had to be reminded of the event by the writer before they could recall its extent. Perhaps the reason that it did not have the same impact upon the minds of the later inhabitants is that it happened when most of the men working were either single or had left their families behind while they sought homes for them. The possibility of an explosion had probably not been seriously considered up to that time and few precautions had been taken, for apparently many of the men smoked in the mine -- one of the greatest offences in modern times.³ Measures were taken later to prevent the recurrence of such a disaster.

Michel was the next mining town to experience an explosion when on January 9, 1904, seven men were killed by what

1. Probably a technical term. Used in reports for "depths".
2. The B. C. Mines Department report gave the number as 125 in 1902 but the Free Press reported some bodies found later bringing the total to 128. Free Press Feb. 12, 1903.
3. Smoking had been illegal and some fines had been levied but apparently with little effect.

was believed to be a gas blast. Coleman had its first explosion on April 3, 1907, in which three men were killed in the International mine by the resultant afterdamp.

The second major disaster, however, was at Bellevue, when an explosion on December 9, 1910, killed thirty men -- a terrible blow to the little town. One of the memorable points about this blast was the death of Fred Alderson, who had come down from Hosmer with the Draeger apparatus as there was no mine rescue equipment in Alberta. His kit proved to be faulty. Being a mine official and not legally employed in Alberta he could not be considered as coming within the scope of the compensation laws of that day, so a fund had to be raised by public subscription to assist his family.

Of all the mining disasters ever to take place in Canada, the one at Hillcrest in 1914 was the most terrible. The explosion took place on June 19, when a full shift was in the mine, and of 235 men, 189 were killed. For days, Hillcrest was a place of horror as bodies were brought out of the mine and laid in rows in the halls in the town. One hundred and fifty bodies were buried in a common grave two hundred feet long. By this time many of the workers had ¹ families so the loss of the men was much more disastrous than in 1902. The situation was worsened by the fact that the company had to

1. Over half the dead were family men. Lethbridge Herald June 19, 1914.

be proved negligent in a court of law before compensation could be paid. This explosion had a great effect on the residents of the Pass and its events are recounted over and over so that there is little likelihood of anyone living in the Pass for any length of time without hearing of it.

In 1915 an explosion took place in the B North mine in Coal Creek but as there was no one in the mine there were no fatalities but four men just entering were injured. The mines inspector, Evan Evans, was killed by the after gases when he went in to inspect the damage. On August 8, 1916, an explosion occurred in No. 3 East mine at Michel at the height of a thunderstorm. Twelve lives were lost but no satisfactory cause of the blast was found. The suggestion that lightning might have been a factor was discounted at the time.

Less than a year later on April 5, 1917, No. 3 mine in Coal Creek was the scene of another disaster in which 34 were killed. The people of Fernie had reason to believe that their town had really been cursed.¹

For almost ten years the Pass was free of explosions, but, in 1926, two occurred in the Alberta section. Hillcrest mine was hit again on September 19 and McGillivray mine at Coleman

1. Fernie, according to an old story, was cursed by the mother of the Indian wife of one of the Fernie brothers when she was sent back to her people by her husband in the early days of prospecting the mines.

had its first misfortune on November 23. Both explosions happened on the night shift when few men were working. Only two men were killed in Hillcrest but there were ten fatalities in Coleman. The latter situation cast a pall of gloom over the town because the mine, which had caught fire, had been flooded to prevent the spread of the flames, and consequently it was some months before the bodies were recovered.

The last explosion in the Pass was at Michel on July 5, 1938, again during a thunderstorm. The mine was idle that day so only five maintenance men were in it, three of whom were killed. The measures taken by the management as a result of the lessons learned from previous explosions localized the blast and there was clear evidence of lightning skipping down the rails to the danger spots in the mine. All railways into the mine were grounded immediately.

There have been no explosions since and none which were the result of internal conditions have occurred since 1926, so there is hope that this great enemy of the miner has at last been controlled.¹

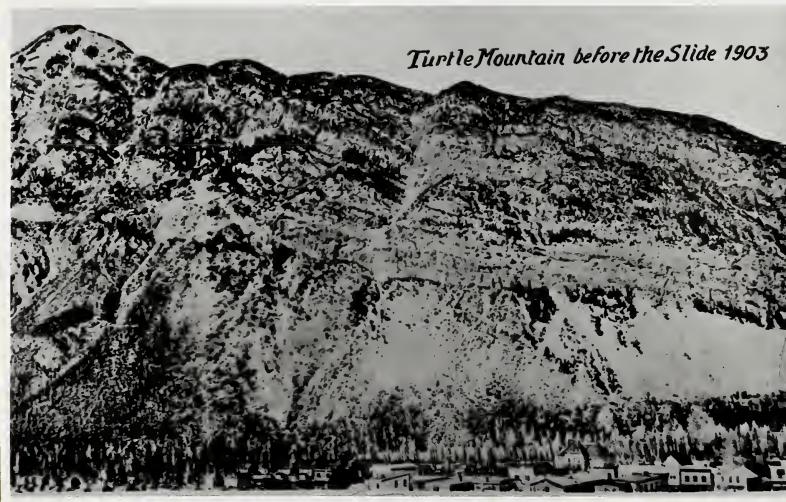
It would be a fine thing to note here the individual acts of heroism in all these horrible events, for many men risked, and sometimes lost, their lives to try to save their fellows. The

1. For measures to control explosions see Chapter 14 below.

newspaper accounts tell of men dragging out fainting comrades or of men being found dead over the bodies of those they were trying to rescue. However, it would be too difficult to recount the real acts of heroism and many of the men who are still alive would be embarrassed by it.



Frank before the landslide. Above -- the town as seen from Turtle Mountain. The railway, lower left, is that leading to the mine. Only the part of the town in the lower right (between the arrows) was affected by the slide. The present village occupies the area covered by the smoke, which seems to be coming from near the sanatorium. The lower picture shows the business section in the right foreground. The buildings at the extreme left of this picture were not affected by the slide. Photo -- F. Graham and E. Gushul



CHAPTER 12
THE FRANK SLIDE

There is scarcely a person in Canada who has not heard of the great landslide which took place at Frank in 1903, for the catastrophe received wide publicity. Unfortunately, most of the stories circulated have either been exaggerated or are completely false.

In 1921 -- only eighteen years after the disaster -- many people living within five miles of Frank had the idea that the bank had been buried, even though it had been less than ten years since the bank building had been moved to Blairmore¹ and many inhabitants of the area at the time had been residents of Frank during the slide. Many people today are astonished to find that all the inhabitants of the town had not been killed, except of course, the one highly publicized little baby found among the rocks. Mr. John Kerr of the Turtle Mountain Playgrounds, who collects all possible information on the slide, has published a pamphlet² which is intended to correct much of the misinformation which has been current. Even the sign placed by the Alberta government at a viewpoint in the slide states " and destroyed

1. Now the home of Henry Zak in Blairmore.

2. The Story of the Great Landslide at Frank in 1903. Undated and no author given. Obtainable from John Kerr, Frank, Alberta. An article The Romance and the Tragedy of the Crow's Nest Pass, in the Canadian Citizen, Calgary by Mrs. T. E. Midiman is also a good source. (Aug. 7, 1947)

the town of Frank." This is not true, for only a small portion of the village was buried. However, since all the buildings have been moved away, it is easy to believe that the town lies buried beneath the pile of rocks.

On April 29, 1903, shortly after four o'clock in the morning, a huge wedge of limestone slipped from the face of Turtle Mountain, struck the bulging lower part of the peak, smashed into the valley and drove up the other side for two miles. About 7,000 feet of Canadian Pacific track was buried but no trains were damaged, one freight having just gone through while the passenger train had not yet arrived. The brakeman of the freight train, Sid Choquette, would certainly be the first man to cross the waste of rocks for he is reported to have struggled back over the rocks to flag down the passenger train.¹

Estimates of the size of the rock mass which fell vary greatly. A story in a magazine in 1903² stated that half a billion cubic yards had fallen. This would be over a billion tons, but by 1910 the National Geographic Society³ had scaled this down to forty million cubic yards. The average estimate today is between seventy and ninety million tons which is close to the 1910 figure. The original wedge of rock is considered to have been 1300 feet

1. Mrs. F. G. Bundy of Pincher, Alberta, tells of seeing a gold watch presented to Mr. Choquette for this feat.
2. Canadian Magazine, Toronto, Vol. 21, 1903.
3. National Geographic Magazine, Washington, D.C. Vol. 21, 1910.

high, 4,000 feet wide and 500 feet thick at its thickest point. This mass is now spread over 3,200 acres.¹

Not much of the town was actually buried although the rock lies one hundred and fifty feet deep in places. "Before" and "After" pictures show that one row of cottages had disappeared at the south-east end of the community, but loose rocks caused damage to houses not actually under the main slide. It was from one of these houses that Mr. and Mrs. Sam Ennes and their four children were able to crawl, although badly scratched by nails and splinters. Their baby found in the soft mud was at first thought to be dead but later proved to be unharmed.

The most famous person associated with the slide is Marion Leitch, now Mrs. Lawrence McPhail of Nelson, B.C., the daughter of a storekeeper who lived a few houses along the street from Sam Ennes. She is often thought of as being the only survivor of the village of Frank. Mrs. J. H. Farmer, whose husband was bank manager in Frank in 1903, states that although the parents were killed and the two boys crushed almost beyond recognition, the three girls, Jessie, May and Marion were practically unharmed. The upper part of the house in which their bedroom had been situated was pushed off the lower part and carried forward by the sliding rocks. The children stayed with Mrs. Farmer for a few weeks until each girl was taken by a

1. From the Alberta Government sign at viewpoint in slide.

different uncle to homes scattered through Western Canada. Jessie is at present a nurse in Vancouver, B. C., but the whereabouts of May cannot be immediately determined.

Another story, that Mrs. Farmer stated was cited in medical journals, was that of a man named Johnson whose side was pierced by a board which had first passed through a feather tick. The doctors spent hours picking feathers from the wound before it could be closed and Mr. Johnson survived his strange experience.

Estimates of the number of dead range from sixty to seventy.¹ No accurate count could be made because of the unknown number of men in a construction camp farther down the valley which was completely buried.

The mine property was severely damaged and most of the surface plant was destroyed. The mouth of the mine was buried but the entombed miners of the night shift dug their way out through another tunnel many hours later.

For some weeks the Mounted Police patrolled the valley, but people soon returned to their homes. The mining company was back in business by the end of May. In two years a new shaft mine had been opened and the community faced the future with high hopes. Until 1911, the village stood with all its business places as they had been before the slide. The bank was on the

1. The population was probably over six hundred.

main street just behind the railway station.¹ No one seems to know how the buried bank story started but it is certainly widely believed. One may step from the station platform and walk across to the basement of the bank and see that it is a good distance from the nearest rocks.

The river, which had been dammed by the slide, backed up when the run-off waters came down, flooding parts of Frank and Blairmore. A channel had to be dynamited through the rocks to relieve the situation.

The Canadian Pacific Railway set to work immediately and built a new road over the rocks and as the years went by, rock was taken out to ballast bridges from the prairies of Saskatchewan to the interior of British Columbia, until today the railway runs along the original earth surface. No road was built immediately but a trail from Bellevue to Frank was cut out on the hills north of the slide and used as a road until a new highway was built through the rocks south of the railway in 1906. In improving this road in the nineteen twenties, a construction gang uncovered one of the houses. A few skeletons were discovered and buried nearby with a sign to tell the story.² About 1932 a new road was built through the slide north of the railway and the

1. The large station which was built just after the slide was destroyed by fire in 1950 and not rebuilt.
2. Believed by Mrs. Farmer to be the remains of a family named Clark.

little graveyard has not since been cared for, as the bridge across Gold Creek leading to it has been removed.

The highway north of the railway was built by men from the relief camps during the depression and later paved to make a good highway, but it remained dangerous because it was bounded by jagged rocks along most of its length. It has been rumored that a new highway to be built in 1952 may follow the original trail, completely away from the slide in the interest of greater safety.

The Dominion government was quick to send men in to investigate the landslide. R. G. McConnell and R. W. Brock of the Geological Survey reported as early as June 12, 1903, on the danger of further slides. Examinations from 1903 to 1910 caused other warnings to be given until a commission of two geologists and an engineer, R. A. Daly, W. G. Miller and G. S. Rice, was sent out to make a recommendation. Their report found no single cause for the landslide but showed that the mountain itself had been very unstable, with extremely contorted rock strata. A slight earthquake in the area in 1901 might have had a further unstabilizing effect but undoubtedly mining at the base of the peak had been a major factor in causing the whole structure to collapse.¹ By a study of cracks in the rocks near the summit of the mountain, which were becoming wider, they concluded that another slide

1. Explosives were used excessively in early mining in the Pass.

was probable. It was on the recommendation of this commission that the government ordered that the village be moved to a safer area north of the tracks. As the commissioners pointed out, although the coal company could in no way be blamed for the original slide, they most certainly could be held culpable should a further slide result from continued mining at the base of ¹ Turtle Mountain.

Most of the buildings had been moved by the time the mining company got into difficulties in 1913 owing to the impossibility of producing coal cheaply enough to meet competition. When the mine was finally closed, in 1917, the remaining houses were taken to the neighboring towns. There is no doubt that the Frank Slide was not the sole reason for the village of Frank shrinking to a population of a little over two hundred requiring but one school room. Had the coal seams proved profitable, Frank might still have been the metropolis of the Crow's Nest Pass.

Further investigations carried out for the Alberta government by Dr. J. A. Allan of the University of Alberta in 1931 and 1932² showed that there was danger of a landslide developing from the south peak of Turtle Mountain, this time towards

1. Report of Commission to Investigate Turtle Mountain, Frank, Alberta. R. A. Daly et al. King's Printer, Ottawa, 1911. p. 10.
2. Annual Report of the Research Council of Alberta, Edmonton, 1931, 1932 Numbers 28, 29, 30.

Hillcrest station, near the eastern end of the slide. Residents of the area near the derelict lime kilns were ordered to move by the provincial government.¹ Most of the people transported their houses to safer places but one or two hardy families have chosen to remain. In spite of all the apparent danger of further slides, nothing untoward has yet occurred.

1. This report probably influenced the decision of the government to build the new highway to the north of the railway in 1932.



Main Street, Frank, in 1903 and 1951
The bank, often thought buried, is the sixth building along the street (with the balcony). The hydrants, if not the same, are in the identical spot.

Photo -- F. Graham and E. Gushul



CHAPTER 13

INDUSTRY, OTHER THAN COAL MINING

Perhaps the first industry in the Crow's Nest Pass was ranching. From the bull pasture in the care of "Dutch Charlie" Weigert, who rode his range with frontier model Colt revolvers at his hips, grew many ranches. On the Alberta side the first ranchers, Douglas Allison and McGillivray¹ raised horses for railway construction. Sherman Parrish, the Good brothers, A. P. McDonald and others continued with fine saddle horses and horses for the many conveyances² of the day; but, with the coming of the automobile, these ranches became unprofitable and one by one they disappeared. Only Parrish persisted and he eked out a meagre existence from the few cattle he could raise until his death in 1948.

However, on the western side, the Elk Valley ranchers concentrated on cattle raising. The wetter summers produced better pastures and hay could be made easily. As the valley was logged over, more land was thrown open for preemption and cattle raising flourished. The formation of agricultural associations "... has meant a great improvement in the breed of stock raised. Fernie

1. Although Mc Gillivray's name appears both in the press and government reports, his first name is not given.
2. They raised horses for all purposes, but their specialty was light horses.

and Elko have become centres for these associations in recent years and fairs are held periodically."¹ Hughes states further that on one occasion 527 head of cattle were sold in Fernie.

For many years lumbering rivalled coalmining both in output and in the number of men employed. There were sawmills in the Pass as early as 1887, but there was no great production until the railways came. In 1907, besides sawmills belonging to the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, the Fernie Free Press proudly told of fifteen operating sawmills producing 40,000 board feet of lumber each day. There were nine mills along the Canadian Pacific line and six along the Crow's Nest Southern. Near the city were the Elk Lumber Company, the Fernie Lumber Company Limited and the North American Land and Lumber Company. McNab and Company opened a mill in 1908. The North American Company had steam locomotives and a bush railway to haul the logs out. The camp at Sparwood was large enough to ask for a school by 1904.

However, large forest fires between 1904 and 1910 and intensive cutting soon made lumbering an industry of secondary importance in the Elk Valley. Mills at Fernie and Sparwood and Knight's Mill between Michel and Crowsnest are still in operation. These were first supplied by flumes from the farther hills but, since the advent of power road-building machinery, by truck.

1. Hughes; op. cit. pp. 4 and 5.

In the area east of the divide, Peter McLaren (later Senator McLaren) who had received the contract to supply ties for the railway through the Pass, built a mill near Blairmore across from the present site of the Crow's Nest Pass Municipal Hospital. He had his choice of land and picked that south of the railway and north of Sentinel around Crow's Nest Mountain. By building flumes to the river and putting in a dam to raise the water level in Crowsnest Lake he was able to transport his logs for about twenty miles. His mill was a large one and for many years he employed Hindus in its operation but they have since left the Pass. The fires of the early twenties caused the mill to close down for the lack of good sawlogs.

About 1905, two other companies operated in areas north of Coleman and Blairmore. The Carbondale Lumber Company had had a small mill north of Coleman and the Pelletier Company had one about two miles west of McLaren's. Pelletier flumed his logs down from the valley that the new forestry highway follows. Recently, Charles Sartoris, owning a mill near the site of McLaren's mill, has been sawing much lumber from logs which have come by truck from areas around the Elk Valley. The Burmis Lumber Company, another recent arrival, obtains its logs from mountain areas south of the Pass and closer to the North Kootenay Pass. These last two companies have the area almost to themselves, as the fires of 1910 put the Carbondale Company out of business and the Pelletier plant

ran out of logs in the early twenties. Numerous small companies continue to operate camps to supply timber for the mines.

The woods on the Alberta side were made part of the Crowsnest Forest Reserve, first under the Dominion government and later under the provincial forestry branch. Because the eastern slopes are so necessary to supply water for prairie irrigation, the timber is "farmed" very carefully by the forest rangers and certain areas are logged each year by companies which put in bids and are, because of the limited quantity of timber, small operators. Experiments in reafforestation have been made and are still being carried out and close control is kept over travel in the forests during dry seasons. There have been very few fires in the past fifteen years and the lower slopes have a much greener look than they had thirty years ago.

There have been quite a number of smaller industries in the Pass during the past fifty years, nearly all of which have disappeared. The many breweries have all vanished with the exception of the Fernie Brewing Company, which has had a busy life since Sick and Mutz started it in 1901 as a branch of the Fort Steele Brewing Company.

Numerous brickworks appeared in the area in the days preceding 1914. In May, 1904, a brick making plant was operated by Wriglesworth and Bullock in Fernie and after the fire of 1908 the Fernie Brick Company was turning out 20,000 bricks per day

for local use. Reuben Steeves operated a plant in Frank in 1907 but when the council objected to his taking clay from one of the streets and some housewives complained about the smoke smudging their washing, he moved his plant to Lundbreck. There was an Austrian Brick Company in Blairmore in 1908 and in 1909 the Pelletier Brick Works was employing twenty men. In 1910, W. J. Budd of the Rocky Mountain Cement Company took over Pelletier's company and operated it in conjunction with the cement plant. By 1914, all these companies had ceased operations because of lack of markets.

Because of the nature of the rocks nearly all the lime producing works were in Alberta. In 1909, Joe Little of Blairmore bought a large area of land in the Frank Slide for the purpose of producing lime from the rocks. The Winnipeg Fuel and Supply Company bought the site from Little and built kilns which were operated under the name of the Frank Lime Company. Thirty-six men were employed at the peak of production but by 1923, when the plant closed, only ten men were employed. George Pattinson, who later served as mayor of Coleman, was the manager during the last few years of operation. The houses were moved to Bellevue about 1932 but the giant kilns may still be seen at the eastern end of the slide. Perhaps, aside from poor markets, the lack of uniformity of the rock of the Frank Slide was a cause of the plant closing. A small kiln was once

operated near Blairmore's east entrance by Mr. Pozzi, a contractor of that town, but it has not been used in the past twenty years although it still stands.

Perhaps the most successful industry in the area and at the same time the least known, is the Summit Lime Works Limited. Although the head office is in Lethbridge and the plant address given as Crowsnest, B. C., the kilns are actually in Alberta, at the western end of Crowsnest Lake and two miles east of Crowsnest station. For a time the children attended school at Crowsnest, but when that school closed they were transported to Coleman schools. Coleman School District was extended to include the area in 1950.

Some old style pot kilns had been operated at this spot on Crowsnest Ridge before 1903 by a number of Italians but Mr. E. G. Hazell bought them out and formed the Summit Lime Works Limited in that year. The family still controls the plant. During World War I the employees were almost exclusively Chinese who remained until the early twenties when they were replaced by Europeans, mostly of Slavic or Hungarian origin. During the period following 1941, a group of people of Japanese origin worked there after their evacuation from British Columbia. These people still work there and have revived the sport of baseball in Coleman by forming practically the whole team. A few Displaced Persons have been employed of late. When the mining companies

began using large quantities of powdered limestone for rock dusting¹ following 1926, the market was assured and in 1935 machinery was installed which did away with much of the hand labor. The company quarries about 50,000 tons of rock annually, using about 4,000 tons of coal and over half a million kilowatthours of electricity from the East Kootenay Power Company. Sugar factories and glassworks in Alberta form another important market for the lime products. The building trades take large quantities of lime and recently a growing trade is being developed in agricultural limestone preparations.

Phosphate rock, a product used first for smelting and then for fertilizer, is found in some quantity throughout the Pass, mostly on the western side, but it is of such low grade that it cannot be transported as far as Trail and still compete with the high grade rock from Montana.² However, for a time in the late twenties, the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company operated a mine just west of Crowsnest, which was closed down in 1931 when the seam proved to be of a lower grade than was first expected.

Another industry which might have been important was the cement industry. Although several plants were planned, only one was built. This is the one mentioned in connection with the

1. See below Chapter 14.

2. Hughes, op. cit., p. 6.

founding of Blairmore which was operated by W. J. Budd. A kiln eight feet by one hundred feet was opened in 1909.¹ and a second one added two years later. The depression of 1914 hit the plant badly and in 1916 there were strong rumors that it was about to close.² As the company supplied electricity for the town of Blairmore, it continued to operate the power plant even when no cement was manufactured. When West Canadian Collieries took over the town lighting, the plant ceased work completely. After the Canada Cement Company purchased the factory in 1919 no further product was put out and the plant was left as it was until the period just before 1939 when all the machinery was taken out and scrapped.³ Today, a large quarry and some gutted buildings mark the site of what was one of the most promising industries in the Pass.

Half a mile north of Burmis station lies one of the most important deposits of iron ore in Alberta.⁴ About 1910, sink holes were put down to explore the ore deposits and several claims were staked somewhat farther north along Cow Creek. The seams are of magnetic shales from five to ten feet thick. The samples analysed ranged from forty to sixty percent iron but

1. Newspapers report the plant in operation in 1908 but the Canada Cement Company gives the date as 1909.
2. Coleman Bulletin, July 19, 1916.
3. The company has no record of the exact date.
4. Allan, John A., First Annual Report of the Mineral Resources of Alberta, Edmonton, 1920. p. 62.

because of a 5.5 percent content of titanium, the ores were considered refractory and consequently useless, although W. W. Leach of the Geological Survey (1911) thought that some means of concentration might be devised to reduce the titanic acid content and simplify smelting. Since coke can be produced within five miles and titanium now has a high commercial value there is some hope that this deposit may some day be utilized. Deposits of iron near Jaffray and Kitchener, British Columbia, may also serve to create a demand for coke for smelting from the Fernie area fifty miles away. The iron deposit contained in the slag heap at Kimberley is also a potential source of iron ore, which might revive the once important coke industry.

CHAPTER 14

COAL MINING

The coal of the Crow's Nest Pass is practically all found in the Kootenay formation although some broken seams of Belly River formation have been worked on a small scale at the base of the main range of the Rockies. The coal is ranked as a medium volatile bituminous coal and is useful for both coking and steaming. Not all seams are good for the making of coke. In some mines, two contiguous layers may be entirely different, one being of good coking quality and the other not. This coking quality has no relation to the amount of carbon but to the "caking" nature of the coal, i.e. its ability to form lumps strong enough to withstand the weight of the smelting charge without crumbling. Nearly all Pass mines have some good coking seams.

The coal of the Pass has a greater amount of heat than the domestic coals of the prairies, averaging 14,000 B.T.U.'s to the pound as compared with 9,000 to 10,000 B.T.U.'s for that of Drumheller. This is what makes the mountain coal an ideal steaming coal. The industry in the Pass developed almost equally for the two types of product required. In 1906, half the coal produced was used for coking and 1128 ovens were in operation by the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company alone to supply the many smelters.¹

1. Hughes, op. cit. p. 93.

When the smelter boom was over,¹ the coke ovens were of much less importance. In 1950, not more than 150,000 tons of coke was produced out of over two million tons of coal mined.

Only the coal bordering on the railroad has been developed and large amounts lie untouched back into the mountains. The upper Elk Valley has a particularly large reserve which has been untouched, although easily accessible, while the new forestry road north of Coleman has caused some development of previously untapped coal seams as far as twenty miles back from the railroad. The Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company estimates that it has a reserve of over six billion tons of coal in seams over three feet thick with less than 2500 feet of cover. The Alberta government estimates that there are over five billion tons of coal in an area of 140 square miles in its side of the Pass.

Without attempting to make a technical treatise on mining, one may make note of three very definite trends in the industry through the years. The first is the continuous striving toward greater safety on the part of companies, miners and government departments. Measures for safety were sometimes advocated by the unions and at other times introduced by the officials or the mine branches. The miners often resisted vigorously changes which

1. The smelter industry had been greatly overdeveloped so that when prices for base metals became depressed about 1914, most of the smelter companies collapsed.

later became universal practice among the workers. The second trend is the constant effort of the companies to produce a better product as competition became keener and, third, at the same time to increase the number of tons of coal per man employed per day.

In the field of safety, until recently, British Columbia generally led because of the early establishment of a mines department in a province in which mining was an established industry before the coal measures of the Pass had even been prospected. In recent years the two provinces have kept pretty well together in any changes in safety regulations.

The annual reports of the mines branches of both provinces show that little care was taken to enforce rigid safety precautions in the early years of the century. An act to set qualifications for officials and miners came into effect in British Columbia in 1902 but had scarcely any time to show results before the great explosion took place at Coal Creek.

A commission investigating the disaster¹ found a great disregard for the most elementary rules of safety in bituminous mines. Many of the men had carried matches and tobacco and others had homemade keys for lighting their own lamps. It was recommended that all shots be tamped with clay (not with coal-dust or dirt) and that only certain permitted explosives be used. Shots were

1. Report of the Minister of Mines (Victoria, B. C. 1903)

to be fired only by qualified shotlighters. It was further recommended that those who could not read instructions in English be excluded -- something that has not come to pass even to the present. Smoking in the mines stopped abruptly although in the following year or two many fines were levied for taking matches into the mines.

There was some dispute and confusion about whether coal-dust itself could initiate an explosion or whether gas exploded first igniting the coal-dust. However, copious watering was recommended to keep down dust. This was not very practicable and rather messy so the rule was not universally observed. The Bonnetted Clanny lamp used was considered unsafe and mines reports show the gradual replacement of these by the safer Wolfe lamp. In mines where safety lamps had not been used there was great opposition to these lamps on the part of the miners. By 1918, however, the mines were using the Edison electric lamp almost exclusively, the safety lamp being used only by the firebosses for testing for gases in the mine. In the first year that safety lamps were required by law in Alberta, the number of gas burns to miners was cut from twenty-six to thirteen.¹

In British Columbia, a new Mines Act came into force in 1910 prohibiting the employment of women and girls in the mines

1. Report of the Mines Branch, (Edmonton, Alberta, 1907.)

and setting the age limit of boys employed at fourteen years for surface work and fifteen years for that underground. However, no birth certificates were required so that many a lad who was twelve or thirteen when school closed in June would be fifteen and working underground by the time school opened in September.

At the same time greater stress was laid on individual safety and mine rescue work. Draeger equipment was supplied and first aid classes were organized in 1910. In 1912 a Mine Rescue station was established in Fernie. The St. John's Ambulance Association became an important factor in the lives of the miners from this period onwards. Hundreds of men spent their Sundays attending first aid classes and mine rescue and first aid competitions were held throughout the Pass. The first large competition was held at Fernie on July 1, 1916, with over five thousand people attending. Many Pass teams later took part successfully in Dominion first aid competitions. It was considered that, apart from its practical value, the teaching of first aid had the further effect of making the men safety conscious -- an important factor in the prevention of accidents.

The Bellevue explosion in 1910 served to show how Alberta had lagged in safety. Although the cause of the explosion was in doubt, it was suspected that the initial blast might have been caused by matches found on the body of the most badly burned miner.¹ No mine rescue equipment was available in Alberta,

1. Alberta, Report of Mines Branch, (Edmonton, 1910)

necessitating teams of "Draegermen" from Hosmer. Apparatus was supplied in Alberta after this and in 1913 a railway car was equipped as a mine rescue car and was moved around from town to town to enable the teams of miners to receive instruction in mine rescue work.¹

A steady decrease was noted in the quantity of explosives used in the Pass area and lists of "permitted" explosives were constantly revised.

The Hillcrest explosion showed that mining men were now more than ever acutely conscious of the function of coal-dust, at least in the "propagation" of explosions. Incombustible dust shelf barriers were ordered installed in the mines to prevent this "propagation", especially when it was shown that the dust in the mines was of an explosive character.

The explosions in Fernie and Michel in the war years from 1915 to 1917 showed that the coal dust menace was far from conquered. Out of these came further watering of dusty places and the spreading of coal ashes to dilute the dust. So important was the dust that it masked the real cause of the first Michel explosion. It took another explosion, which was localized by other means, to show that lightning could skip down rails into the mine and ignite gas or dust.

1. This car is still in use but is "dismounted" and fixed at Blairmore.

The explosions in Hillcrest and Coleman in 1926 have proved to be the last that have occurred which are attributable to actual mining causes. The steps taken following these disasters were the result of experiments carried out in Europe and by the United States Bureau of Mines on the explosive character of a critical mixture of coal-dust and air. These agencies found that non-explosive dusts mixed with coal-dust would prevent dangerous concentrations. Finely powdered limestone was spread in all dusty areas, especially in the main roadways. This system is now standard practice in all the bituminous mines and the only explosion since, at Michel in 1938, rather proved than disproved the efficacy of the rock-dusting. There were only five men in the mine at the time and the two survivors were able to testify to seeing lightning running along the rails into different parts of the mine. The resultant explosion was localized by the limestone dust.¹ All rails were grounded immediately and it appears that at long last some measure of control has been gained over the greatest danger the miner faces. However, with increasing mechanization, has come increased dustiness. The workings are watered copiously when coal conveyers and other machines are used in dry places.

Two other phenomena which took heavy toll of lives through the years, especially in British Columbia, were gas "blowouts" and

1. B. C. Report of the Minister of Mines, (Victoria, 1938).

"bumps". "Blowouts" were caused by pockets of gas under tremendous pressure pushing out coal with explosive force as the miners dug closer to them. When six men were killed in Fernie in 1928 from this, the Department of Mines announced that this was the first time in ten years that lives had been lost from this cause, because the number of "blowouts" had been decreased by boring twenty feet ahead into the face. As this had not been done in the case mentioned, it was then made mandatory to bore ahead in all places. Somewhat less trouble has been experienced since, but "blowouts" have continued in some degree to the present.

The cause of "bumps" has been a point of dispute for many years.¹ They usually occur in areas where there is a heavy overburden such as in the Elk Valley. Hammerlike blows, often of earthquake intensity,² shudder through the mine, knocking out props and caving in the roof over a large area. They are believed to be caused by rigid strata of rock far above the coal seams remaining intact when the rocks immediately above the seams settle with the removal of the coal. Later pressure from above causes these rock seams to shatter with a force

1. The Canadian Department of Mines and Technical Surveys has a team of scientists making an intensive study of "bumps" and related subjects in the Pass at present. A report should be available shortly.
2. Seismographs in Spokane were affected by a "bump" in Fernie in 1942.

that shakes the whole surrounding area.¹ At first it was believed that careless mining was the cause but it is now thought that, where there is more than 2,500 feet of overburden, "bumping" is likely to occur. From the first one in 1906, "bumps" have occurred at Coal Creek with monotonous regularity. In the early years it was stated that a "bump" in No. 1 East mine could be felt in Fernie, Morrissey and Hosmer. Again in 1921 the British Columbia government reported that " 'bumps' merely blew out a few hundred feet of roadway."² Finally in 1935, following two "bumps", the inside part of the No. 1 East mine was abandoned and only the outside portion worked. In 1941, seventeen "more serious" bumps were recorded so the company decided, in 1942, to open a new mine, the Elk River Colliery, one mile west and to abandon No. 1 East as the new mine developed. The new tunnel is much higher up the mountain and to the present time, no "bumps" have occurred, giving support to the theory that great depth rather than poor mining practice is the cause.

No "bumps" have occurred in the short-fault mines of the Alberta side, but as these mines attempt to extract coal at

1. Called "violent relief stresses" in Conditions and Occurrences in the Canadian Coal Mining Industry, A. Ignatief et al. Canadian Mining Journal, Ottawa, Vol. 72, October 1951.
2. B. C., Report of the Minister of Mines, (Victoria, 1921)

new deep levels it will be of interest to see whether "bumping"
¹ will occur. Michel has experienced but one "bump" and that in 1948.

In considering the accidents which can happen, it is worth noting that fires, usually of spontaneous origin, have occurred in the mines without explosions resulting. From 1913 on, Corbin was fighting constantly to keep ahead of fires. When the property was closed, several of the mines had already been abandoned.² A fire broke out in Coal Creek mine in 1918, but it was soon checked. Michel was forced to seal off an abandoned mine which started to burn in 1937. Not long after this, flames burst out on a main slope in the International mine at Coleman while the men were on shift, necessitating the flooding of a considerable portion of the mine. Blairmore had a similar experience when a fire broke out in the Greenhill mine near the surface in October, 1943. The area was sealed off in April, 1944, after attempts were made to choke off the fire with dry ice. Although none of these fires proved disastrous there was great danger in each case of the loss of the whole mine had the fires been uncontrolled.

1. The International Mine in Coleman has worked down pitch to a cover of 2300 feet, the deepest in Western Canada at present.

2. No. 4 was closed in 1917 and No. 6 in 1934.

Meanwhile, the mines departments were constantly stressing safety in other ways and, as the miners had opposed the use of the Wolfe safety lamp, so did they resist attempts to make them wear safety helmets (which all miners now use), when they were introduced in 1934. It took persistent propaganda on the part of the officials to convince the men that these hats would save lives. The same opposition occurred when goggles, knee caps and hard-toed shoes were advocated. The miner is a practical man who does not like to have anything heavy on his head or limbs when he is working and is also somewhat conservative in his resistance to "new-fangled" ideas. Proof was not long in coming that these new ideas were worth while.¹

The mines inspectors and management have tried to cut down accidents in many ways. All through the reports of the mines branches of both provinces runs a story of accidents followed by attempts to remove the cause. More and more of these recommendations were incorporated into the respective Mines Acts, including regulations on blasting, ventilation and testing for gases. On haulage particularly, there are many rules, for most of the accidents occur in that branch of mining. There were also rigid regulations on hours of work and many other seemingly ordinary

1. One mining company hung a crushed helmet in the lamp room with a notice telling the miners how one of their comrades had been protected by it.

acts of mining. The miners themselves have forced a goodly number of these regulations on the official or have negotiated them in the agreements. However, when pressure is great, many of these rules are disregarded, especially by the younger men who would rather do a job the quickest rather than the safest way. This is why the death and accident rate is greater on the haulage than in other occupations in the mine, for most of the young men are employed here. Regardless of what precautions may be taken to prevent accidents, mining will remain a hazardous business as long as men must go into the earth to extract coal.

The first step in reducing the cost per ton is generally the introduction of coal-cutting machinery. Because of the steep pitch of many of the mines, coal was rather easy to extract by the use of chutes for loading, so that coal-cutting and loading machinery was much later in appearing in the Pass than on the flat seams of the prairies. This does not mean that coal-cutting machinery was not known in the area, but that its actual use in day to day mining dates from but a few years back. Perhaps part of the reason was the difficulty of working with machines on the pitch, where gravity tends to pull the cutters back from the face.

However, certain types of machines were used early. Compressed air engines or "dinkies" were in operation in nearly all mines between 1906 and 1916 for hauling coal cars, while

large electric hoists were used for bringing cars up the slopes. Attempts were made to use coal-cutting machines in British Columbia, especially at Michel in 1913, and airpicks were used in Hosmer. There were only five cutters in Fernie and Michel by 1923 and none at all in 1927. Apparently they did not pay their way. Corbin used devices called Shovelloaders in 1924. No machines for cutting or loading were employed on the eastern side which had the steepest pitch in 1913 but by 1924 airpicks were common and Blairmore and Coleman were using conveyors.

In 1931 and subsequent years, the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company embarked on a large scale switch to mechanization. This included coal-cutting machines, loaders and conveyors along the face and was tried, first at Michel and later at Coal Creek. The changeover also entailed training the miners in a new type of mining. In 1938 it was noted in the report of the inspector of mines that great difficulty was being experienced in this training.¹

The saucer-shaped seams of the Elk Valley were much better adapted to mechanization than the steeply pitching seams of the Alberta mines. However, the seams of the Adanac mine south of Bellevue averaged only about ten degrees of pitch, a fact which influenced the West Canadian Collieries to try

1. B. C. Report of the Minister of Mines. Many old miners considered the new method of a single row of props behind the machines to be too dangerous.

machinery there first. Loaders were introduced in 1944 and by 1947 duck-bill loaders, hoists, cutters and conveyors were in full use.

Another development which tends to increase production is strip mining. At first this was attempted only at Corbin's Big Showing. In 1912 an attempt to take off the overburden with water from hoses failed but a more successful attempt was made in 1915 when a steam shovel was used for loading. It was an attempt to use gasoline shovels and White trucks in 1932¹ and after, that set off the strike which ended in the closing of the mine. In 1943, when the demand for coal was great, the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company hired Frank O'Sullivan of Lethbridge to mine the Corbin outcrop, and, with the machinery then available, roads were built, the overburden removed by bulldozers and the coal, after being blasted, was loaded by giant Euclid loaders into trucks which hauled it to the railway. Later, the Fred Mannix Company, specialists in this type of operation, undertook the work at Corbin and at other places where stripping was practicable. In 1945, stripping operations were commenced at Blairmore and in 1947 at Michel. By 1947 Blairmore was working the outcrop seams of the old Lille property on Grassy Mountain while both Coleman companies were stripping to the north of McGillivray mine and along York Creek. The Hillcrest

1. In former attempts, coal cars on rails were used.

Mohawk Company started a strip mine high on Tent Mountain near the British Columbia boundary and are at present hauling the coal from this Glacier Strip by highway to Bellevue, twenty-five miles away.

Coming from an outcrop, strip coal is not of the cleanest. So, when orders are short the surface activities are curtailed. Consequently, there has hitherto been little labor opposition to the development. Because of the nature of the seams with their steep pitch, stripping cannot be carried on profitably at any great depth. Deeper coal must be mined as before.

All companies have made great changes in the methods of preparing coal for the market in the past fifty years. Tipples were built almost as soon as the seams were prospected. The first structures were mainly of wood and were merely devices to facilitate loading into railway cars of what amounted to "mine-run" coal. It is rather an odd fact that no matter how bad the future of the industry appeared, the companies never lost faith and continued to spend huge sums in the improvement of their plants even in such apparently hopeless times as the depression. Tipples would be burnt down only to be rebuilt, always on a grander scale with more elaborate equipment.

In order to produce coal clean enough for coke-making, both Lille and Hosmer used "wet" washers, i.e. those using the

principle of flotation in fluids, but this was only for slack coal, and both plants disappeared with the closing of their mines. Mine reports and prospectuses always mentioned new tipples, usually with statistics on the number of tons of coal that could be handled per hour or shift. Amount and not quality was the requirement of the early days because the railways accepted "mine-run" coal. Up to World War I, the improvements in coal processing were generally in screening it to several different sizes. Rock was picked out by hand as the coal passed over picking tables. This process was used in Bellevue's new tipple in 1908 and generally in all mines by the war's end.

In the period between the wars "dry" washers were introduced which cleaned the coal by air blast. Blairmore's Greenhill mine installed one in 1924, McGillivray in Coleman in 1926 and other mines in quick succession afterwards. The towns were soon practically smothered in coal-dust. This caused citizens to petition the companies to find some way to keep the dust out of the atmosphere, but nothing was done.¹

The "wet" washer may be recognized in the reports by reference to "jigs", the name given to the actual washing device. Mr. Vissac, formerly of the West Canadian Collieries at Blairmore,

1. Coleman and Michel suffered more than the other towns because the residential area is close to the plants but recently, the Blairmore council made representations to the West Canadian Company with a similar negative result.

devised a jig which was very successful in washing Crow's Nest Pass coal in order to cut the percentage of ash down to the maximum permitted by the railways at the present time.¹

The new tipple started in Corbin in 1926 housed one of the most modern wet washing plants. When the plant was burned down just as it was completed in 1928, the job had to be done all over again. In 1934, wet washers were in operation at Blairmore and Coleman with Vissac jigs and English Baum jigs. In 1936 a Vissac jig was put into the Mohawk plant in Bellevue.

The British Columbia coal is somewhat cleaner than that of Alberta so the company delayed the installation of cleaning machinery until 1932, when Michel installed a dry washer. The low clinker point proved to be a blessing, as it made Michel coal particularly useful for automatic stokers. The manufacture of stoker coal was probably one reason why the air cleaning plant was purchased. In 1936 three Vissac jigs were added and when the tipple was burned down in 1937, the whole plant was rebuilt with the latest in wet washing equipment. The new Elk River plant was built with the most modern wet washing jigs in 1943.

The Michel mine had ten by-product ovens built in 1938 and ten more were installed a year later. The only product saved

1. 15%. There are many difficulties associated with coal washing which are too technical for discussion here.

was the tar, which was sold for road building. The coal gas was used at first as fuel for Buick engines which operated the machinery, but, proving corrosive, it is now used only to preheat the ovens.

With the demand of the railways for less and less "fines" in their coal, the problem of securing a market for the very fine coal washed out as a soupy mud called "slurry", became quite a pressing one. Coleman and Michel used some of it for coking, but the rest, and that from mines with no coke-making facilities, was piled in great heaps. The slurry is useful for steam plants utilizing pulverized coal, but the cost of drying is excessive and it is permitted to dry in the open. With the windy weather common in the Pass it takes little imagination to realize that the dust of the dry washers now has competition. Dry washers worked in shifts but slurry piles were available twenty-four hours a day. Blairmore experimented with briquettes. Taking this fine coal and mixing it with oil the company pressed it into lumps of nut size. Since 1947, the plant has been turning out large quantities of a product for which there is a good market. The West Canadian Company is the only one at present producing briquettes in the Pass.

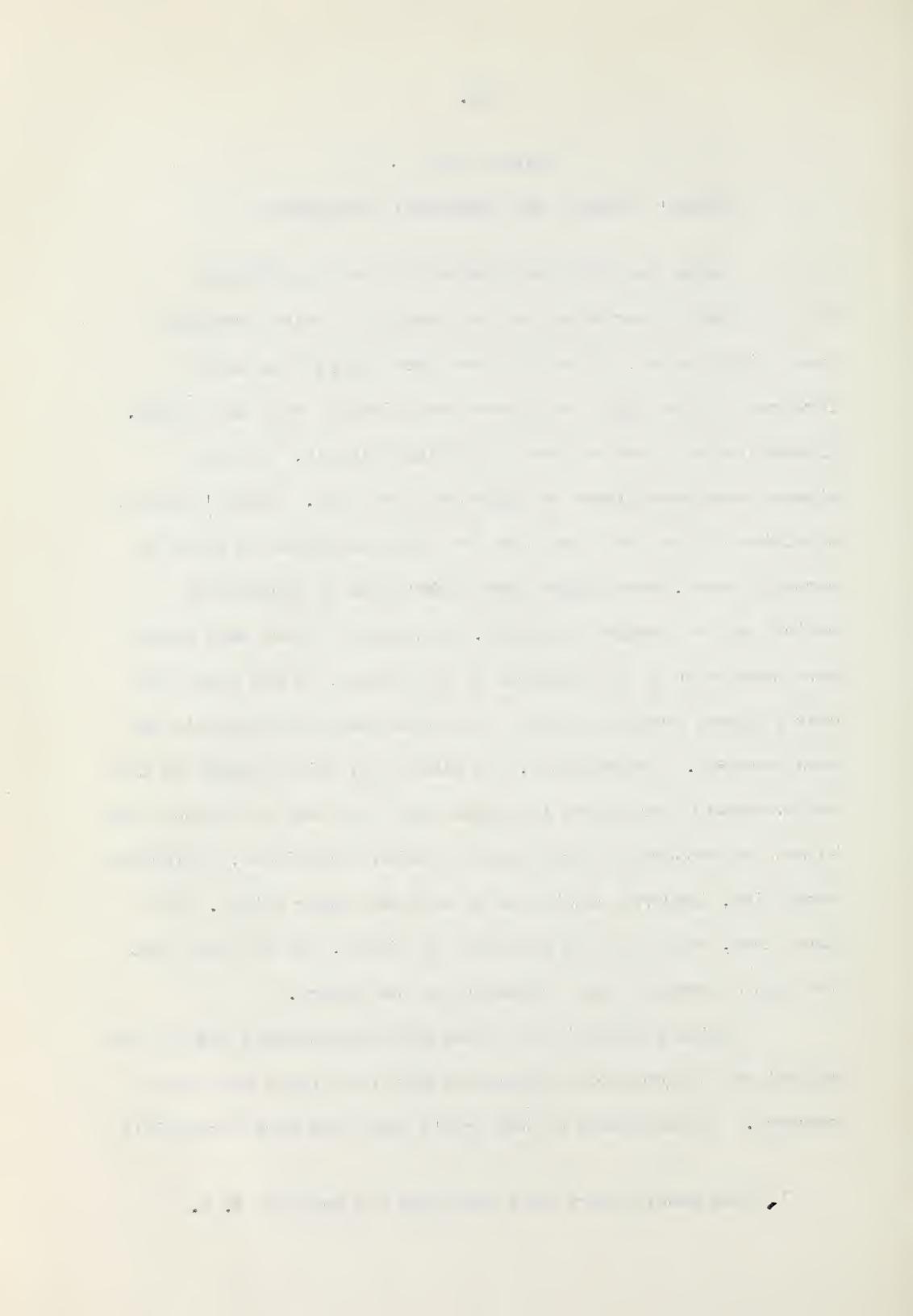
CHAPTER 15

MINERS' UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Being the only large industrial body in Alberta that is widely distributed and yet capable of being organized into a tight union, the coal miners have always been in the forefront of the fight to improve conditions of work and living. Although this is not so true of British Columbia,¹ the coal miners there have played an important part also. Miners' unions, by virtue of the fact that they are often the first to fight on certain issues, have always been looked upon as excessively radical by the people in general. Yet many of these same people have benefitted by the advances of the miners, as any gains are nearly always granted to other industries once the principle has been accepted. Consequently, the miners can point proudly to the achievements of organized labor and show that they have been first to set the pattern in such issues as union recognition, collective bargaining, improved conditions of work and other things. The Mines Acts, which are the rulebooks of mining, are in large part the list of demands made originally by the miners.

Union leadership has often been unreasonable and far too radical but the operators themselves have not always been above reproach. If the miners of the Crow's Nest Pass were responsible

1. The metal miners have dominated the scene in B. C.



for causing the passing of the Lemieux Act dealing with industrial relations in 1907,¹ it was the Hillcrest Coal Company which was first fined under that act for an illegal lockout in 1908. It was General Manager Tonkin who in Fernie in 1902 added the number of those who did not vote to those who voted against an eight hour day clause in order to get a sufficient number to overcome the majority which had voted in favor. He said that those who did not vote were evidently satisfied with the situation as it was. In 1909 the United Mine Workers of America was bitterly denounced by the press and all "decent citizens" for passing a "remarkable resolution"² permitting Asiatics to join their union.

Unions were not encouraged by the companies but local unions managed to appear very early in Fernie. The Western Federation of Miners, which had been formed for the metal miners at Rossland in 1895, expanded into the eastern British Columbia coal area in 1902, forming District No. 7. When the United Mine Workers of America appeared they claimed the coal miners and organized District 18 in 1903.³ The W. F. M., which became extremely socialistic, was soon involved in a bitter jurisdictional fight causing the strike of mines and railways which

1. Logan, H. A. History of Trade Union Organization in Canada (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1928). This book and idem. cited below supply most of the information for this chapter.
2. Fernie Free Press Feb. 13, 1909.
3. Fernie was the first local of the U.M.W.A. in Canada.

led to the passing of the Lemieux Act. The W. F. M. was so badly weakened by the strike that it agreed in 1908 to leave the coal mines to the U.M.W.A. but continued to function in the metal mines.

An even more radical organization, the International Workers of the World, threatened the U.M.W.A. just before the war of 1914, but its power declined as a result of its disastrous Grand Trunk Railway strike in 1913 and it was banned in 1918 because it was controlled by a foreign-born executive, some members of which were enemy aliens. This union made a strong bid to oust the U.M.W.A. following the eight month strike fiasco in 1911, but the original union weathered the storm and was instrumental in negotiating the high wage awards of the war period.

In 1919 the One Big Union appeared. This was a class union opposed to production for profit and favoring the Russian "social experiment".¹ When District 18 went on strike against a wage reduction in May, 1919, the O.B.U. became active and the whole of District 18 changed allegiance so that the U.M.W.A. charter was revoked. The new District No. 1 O.B.U. found the companies aligned with the U.M.W.A. and wage increases of 13 per cent were given to those who returned to work and signed the check-off for dues to the U.M.W.A.. By August, several locals

1. Logan, op. cit. p. 190.

had rejoined District 18. There was tremendous bitterness and much intimidation, but one wage increase after another, up to a total of \$2.50 a day by October, 1919, finally caused the defeat of the O.B.U.,¹ but at great expense to the U.M.W.A.. There was wholesale discrimination and many of the O.B.U. supporters were forced from their jobs.

The operators, once the menace of radicalism was removed, regretted their generosity and tried to force wages down. A strike in 1922 staved off a reduction but another strike followed further demands by the companies in 1924. The demand had been for a fifty per cent reduction but the union settled for a fifteen per cent decrease. However, the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company kept its Coal Creek mines closed until the miners accepted a further fifteen percent cut and broke with the union. Michel, Blairmore and Coleman followed suit and the United Mine Workers retired from the field with a badly depleted treasury. "The defection from the international was engineered by the communists capitalizing on the general unrest and dissatisfaction, but basically the cause of the trouble was wage reduction imposed upon men whose union had coached them well in holding the line but had not prepared them to stand with it in compromise."²

1. Logan believes that the 1924 defection was the settling of old scores from this strike.

2. Logan, H. A. Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto: MacMillan, 1948), p. 197.

The miners in each of the towns set up their own unions which were much too weak to deal with the operators successfully. In 1925, the Mine Workers Union of Canada was formed with the idea of giving Canada a national union and the locals of the Crow's Nest Pass were soon affiliated with it. Because it was not recognized by the operators as a bargaining agent the M.W.U.C. benefitted the miners little. In 1931, the Workers' Unity League, "the general representative in Canada of the Red International of labor unions with headquarters in Moscow",¹ gained control of the M.W.U.C. and precipitated a series of strikes to force its recognition in the Pass. The lack of any marked success along this line caused many M.W.U.C. locals to rejoin the U.M.W.A. when the Alberta Federation of Labor called a conference in Calgary in 1936. Coleman, which had split from the union in 1932², rejoined the International in 1939. Throughout the second war the U.M.W.A. was in control, generally following the pattern set by John L. Lewis in the United States, in defiance of the law occasionally, but usually was more moderate than its U. S. counterpart.

The list of gains made by the miners in the fifty years of union activity is impressive and in most of these they were the pioneer industry. The eight hour day was fixed shortly after 1902

1. *ibid.* p.341.

2. See above p. 108

in British Columbia and in 1909 in Alberta. By 1911 the checkweighman or checkmeasurer was accepted as was the "make-up" principle.¹

The constant battles of the coal unions were instrumental also in getting the Labor Acts passed in the two provinces, which, while laying down procedure for bargaining, ipso facto accepted the principle. Conditions of picketing, striking, negotiation, arbitration and other labor matters were set out so that other industries would receive the benefits of the precedents set by the miners.

One development unique in the Pass is the Pit Committee. Acting as a grievance committee, this group irons out small matters with the management so that they do not become union issues. Because of these committees, walkouts of single mines or short strikes for trivial reasons have been practically non-existent since 1932. This does not hold for the lignite fields of Alberta.

Probably one of the most important reforms growing out of the persistent efforts of the miners was that of workmen's compensation. From the earliest times negligence had to be proved on the part of the employers in courts of law before workers or dependents could sue for compensation for injuries

1. Checkweighmen are men paid by the union to ensure honest weighing of coal, while "make-up" is a type of minimum wage for contract miners.

or death. As the workman concerned or the widow would be least able to take such action, the unions very early fought the cases for them. Each award given as a result of the Hillcrest explosion of 1914 was a separate court order.

The commission investigating the depression in the coal industry in 1907 considered that this condition was intolerable, but the situation was not changed until the Workmen's Compensation Acts were passed in 1917 in British Columbia and in 1918 in Alberta. For disability pensions and compensation the companies were assessed according to their accident rate, thus encouraging the promotion of safety measures by the employers. The cost of medical aid in the treatment of injuries was at first met by a small levy on the miners but this was added to the operators' costs in 1914 in Alberta and in 1946 in British Columbia.¹ The acts have been broadened greatly since their introduction and about 1940 silicosis was recognized as compensatable in Alberta and the existing law on that disease was extended to coal mines in British Columbia in 1943. The unions continue to press for more extensive coverage and higher disability pensions.

The second world war saw further improvement in the conditions of work. In 1943, the five-day week was inaugurated,

1. Canada, Report of the Commission on Coal Justice Carroll et al. (Ottawa; King's Printer, 1946) shows these costs to be 11% of the payroll compared to $5\frac{1}{4}\%$ in Nova Scotia. p. 294.

following a strike which won the wages of six days for the five to be worked. In 1946, a welfare fund was set up by union agreement to pay a pension to those incapacitated by non-compensatable injuries or illnesses by means of a levy of a certain sum for each ton of coal mined. The miner who is "burnt out" before reaching pensionable age under the Old Age Pensions Act is given a pension and those unable to work, but with a small compensation allowance, have their pensions made up to the full sum. In 1950 this was \$75 per month.

The most recent advance for the miners was the granting of two weeks holidays with pay, which was quickly followed by an Alberta act making holidays with pay standard in all industries. The idea was not new but had been put forward by miners for many years. In fact, the reports of the British Columbia Department of Mines in the early twenties carry a suggestion by one of the Crow's Nest Pass mines inspectors that holidays with pay would be a good way to cut down absenteeism by giving the men something to work for.¹

Perhaps it may appear that the unions have advanced too quickly and demanded too much, but past experience has shown that the miners are merely ahead of the times -- as the Chartists were over a century ago.

1. The agreement has a clause requiring that a certain percentage of shifts be worked before the holidays are granted.

CHAPTER 16

THE PEOPLE

Of all the towns in the Crow's Nest Pass, only Fernie is predominantly British in origin. A close study of the school population was made by the writer, through the cooperation of the principals of the schools, in order to determine the percentages of the different national groups in the general population. It was assumed that the relation between the national origins of the children would give a reasonably accurate picture. The calculation was made more difficult by the amount of inter-marriage and in order to avoid confusion, the original nationality of the father (or his father if the former were Canadian born) was noted. The origin of the mother was not considered.

The survey through the schools was necessary because the census figures do not give a true picture.¹ For example, the census lists a great number of Austrians when there are really very few. The people generally classify themselves according to the language they speak rather than by the nation controlling their home area. A person speaking the Ukrainian language might have been successively Austrian, Romanian, German or Russian while another speaking the same language might be called Polish. Czechs and Slovaks also consider themselves as distinct

1. See Appendix Tables I, II and III.

nationalities although the children become confused occasionally.

Furthermore, because the districts around the towns as well as the unorganized communities are all lumped together into one district, it is almost impossible to get any idea of the population of places like Bellevue and Michel. The schools in each town accommodate the children of the surrounding "tax colonies"² and a relation between towns including these places may be seen by considering the size of the school enrollment.

Two large language groups dominate the Pass towns. The Slavs, consisting of Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Yugo-Slavs, Czechs and Slovaks are the largest group, while all the people originating from the British Isles together with Americans and Eastern Canadians, form the other. The Italians form a sizeable proportion of the population in all the towns. There are many other nationalities represented. In fact, the census taker in Blairmore in 1941 stated that there were at least 33 nationalities in that town alone.

The English-speaking population is made up noticeably of those who came from mining areas. The Eastern Canadians are largely from Nova Scotia, the Welsh from South Wales, the English from Lancashire and Yorkshire and the Scots from Stirlingshire and

1. One girl claimed Czech origin while her brother said that he was a Slovak.
2. These little unorganized sections which are "of the town but not in it" are characteristic of mining towns. See below p. 184.

Fifeshire -- all coal mining areas. The French and Belgians conform to this pattern also but the other peoples do not. Although many of the Slav people lived near mining areas, very few of them ever worked in mines before coming to Canada. Most European immigrants are of peasant stock.

These European peoples are prone to stay together in groups. There are large Polish and Ukrainian groups in Coleman and small ones in Blairmore. There are a few Czechs in Coleman and a larger number in Blairmore and Frank. Michel and Bellevue have a large Slovak group while Hillcrest's population shows quite a concentration of Ukrainians. Most Italians are found in Coleman, Fernie and Michel, while, because of the French origin of the West Canadian Company, most of the French and Belgians live in Blairmore. These national groups are not only from the same country but very often from the same part of it. A map made by some students a few years ago showed that almost all of the Slovak people in Coleman came from two small areas in Czecho-Slovakia.¹ Until the arrival of the Polish Veterans and Displaced Persons following 1945, there were very few persons from eastern Poland in the Pass. Younger people of Polish origin, who spoke only a dialect, had much difficulty in understanding the new arrivals.

The larger the group, the more likely the people are to live in close proximity to each other. Coleman was unique in this

1. Under guidance of the writer as a social studies project.

regard. West Coleman was "Slavtown", Second Street was "Italiantown" and East Coleman was the home of most of the Poles and Ukrainians. Blairmore's "Cement-town" was the home of most of its Italian population. This zoning is not nearly as distinct as it was twenty-five years ago as second and third generation couples move into the better, less crowded residential areas.

Many of the old timers believe that there were very few "foreigners" in the Pass in the early days and lists of school children published in the early newspapers seem to bear this out. However, when John Bulko formed his Canadian Union¹ in 1909, a list of members, mostly Slavic, was published in the Coleman Miner. It shows many of the names so common today in the Pass. In fact the Coleman publisher put out a short-lived newspaper -- Slavok Canadie,² printed in Slovak to appeal to the foreign born. Many issues of the Pass newspapers contained appeals in French, Italian or Polish to get the "issues" before the people.

Probably the reason the non-English-speaking group did not make much of an impression at first was their habit of coming singly, in contrast to the more English method of immigrating as a family. Consequently, on examining the school

1. This attempt to form a national union was not important but the list of members was complete and is of value in this connection.
2. The spelling varies from issue to issue in the Coleman and Blairmore newspapers.

lists in the earliest days, one would find the British element predominating, but by 1914 a greater number of names of continental origin began to appear in the lower grades. The "bachelors" sent to Europe at first for old sweethearts or "picture brides", but later many of them married second generation girls often as young as thirteen or fourteen.

Compulsory school attendance in British Columbia (1904) and Alberta (1911) brought many more of the children into closer contact with the Canadianizing process.¹ In 1923 in Coleman there were no children of non-British parents in Grades ten, eleven and twelve but in 1950 the percentages of the various origins were almost the same in the high school as in the elementary school.² This would indicate that these people are now assimilated into the school system in the same proportion as their ratio to the general population.

The attitude of the English-speaking people was not very friendly at first. In almost the first issues of the Fernie newspapers there was much condemnation of "Dago and Slav" immigration. The danger of forest fires was considered great in 1901 because of the carelessness of Slavs and Italians. The shacks occupied by the "Russians" were considered by the editors

1. Inspectors' reports in B. C. in 1903 and in Alberta in 1910 showed that forty-four percent attendance was common.
2. See Appendix Table IV.

as being unfit for human habitation. The Coleman Miner "blamed" the election of Socialist O'Brien in 1909 on "illiterate Slavs and Dagoes" who should never have been allowed to vote.

There was a strong feeling of "white superiority" too among the miners. When, in a story on the escape of the miners from the Frank mine following the landslide, the Frank Paper stated that several men had collapsed, there was an angry denial, in a letter to the editor, that any such thing had happened. However, a few "foreigners", they admitted, had given up, while the others were trying to dig a hole through and were lying down, hopelessly awaiting death. The implication was plain.

In the stories of the Fernie fire of 1908, there was surprise that the foreign element had not become panic-stricken but had behaved admirably -- almost as well as the segment of population that could be depended upon to behave in that manner.

Gradually this resentment was broken down as many of the abler men of the first generation made a success in business life. Slav citizens, shortly began to play a part in the political life of the towns,¹ especially when, being multi-lingual, some of them achieved distinction in union affairs. As the unions began to play an important role in civic government, many first and, later, second generation new Canadians served ably on councils and schoolboards.

1. Councillor S. Leoski was elected in Coleman in 1913.

The term "Bohunk" is not nearly as much used as formerly, as there is an increasing tendency to consider each other as equals, although occasionally there appears to be some feeling of inferiority on the part of those few who consider their non-British origin a handicap. However there has been very little changing of names other than occasional simplification of spelling or adopting of a more phonetic pronunciation from an English point of view.¹ The amount of intermarriage has been very large. Because of this, it is becoming increasingly difficult to label anyone with any particular nationality -- other than Canadian. In some cases there are four-way combinations of national origins. So, for statistical purposes all that can be done is to assume that a Polish name means that the person is of Polish origin and hope that errors in the other directions will even up the figures. An attempt to classify the origins of both parents amongst children in school produced a hopeless jumble, especially among the younger children, who are nearly all third generation.²

Racial origin seems to receive little consideration in marriage, although religion sometimes acts as a deterrent as between Catholic and Protestant, but even here it is hardly an important barrier. The number of Roman Catholics bears the same

1. Nearly all the languages of central Europe use alphabets that are almost perfectly phonetic.
2. See Appendix Table III.

ratio to the number of Protestants as the number of non-British bears to British because what decrease is caused by the Greek Orthodox or non-Catholic Europeans is made up by the number of English-speaking Catholics.¹

The question of just how many people have lived in the Pass towns through the years has been rather a vexing one, particularly on the eastern side where census figures have never told a very satisfactory story. All towns are quite distinct but many of the residents live outside the town limits. This may sound odd, but East Coleman, Carbondale, and Graftontown are all definitely part of the town of Coleman for shopping and education and all miners are employed at one or other of the two mines. The same is true for Blairmore and Fernie. However, the population of these outlying places in Alberta is counted in with that of Hillcrest and Bellevue and any other people who happen to live in between the towns. This whole area is officially Local Improvement District No. 71. There has, therefore, been considerable guessing, generally very liberal, as to the actual population. The situation has been almost as bad on the British Columbia side. At present there are only two large communities in the British Columbia area, incorporated Fernie and unincorporated Michel-Natal. The other communities are so small that one may arrive at a fair estimate of Michel-Natal by assuming that most

1. This was proved true for Coleman and assumed for the other towns.

of the inhabitants of the unincorporated district live in that community.

In 1901 Fernie had 1640 people and had reached 3146 by 1911. Michel had ¹ 476 inhabitants in 1901, when Frank had 19 and Blairmore 243. By 1911 Coleman had appeared with 1557, while Blairmore had grown to 1137. In the same year Coleman estimated its population as 2350 in the Alberta Gazetteer and Directory while Blairmore had claimed only 1,000. In 1921 Coleman had but 1590 to Blairmore's 1552 but L.I.D. No. 71 was given a population of 3,856 with no clue given as to how this figure was arrived at. Fernie had dropped to 2802 and Michel was indistinguishable in a new federal census division.

It was thought by the writer that some sort of picture might be obtained if the figures for the number of ration books issued during the second war were used. The numbers for the British Columbia towns are as near as the issuers could remember them, while the Alberta numbers are the actual published figures.

| | Range from |
|--|----------------|
| Fernie (including Morrissey, Coal Creek, Hosmer) | 3230 to 3250 |
| Natal - - - - - | 1750 to 1785 |
| Michel - - - - - | 800 to 800 |
| Coleman (including Sentinel and Lime Kilns) - - | 3067 to 3169 |
| Blairmore - - - - - | 1996 to 2162 |
| Frank - - - - - | 215 to 226 |
| Bellevue - - - - - | 1621 to 1980 |
| Hillcrest - - - - - | 742 to 853 * |
| TOTAL - - - - - | 13421 to 14225 |

1. The Michel figure was published in the Free Press possibly from information available then. All other figures except where otherwise stated are from the Dominion Census.

* The 1941 census figures give 14,515 for a slightly larger area. See Appendix Table VII.

There were between one hundred and one hundred and fifty men on military service from each town during this period but this was more than made up by the influx of strangers, mostly from farming areas, to work in the mines. The war period saw the first large migration into the Pass since the last years of extensive immigration from Europe in 1925 and 1926.

Following 1945, large numbers of displaced persons, mostly single, have come into the area. The largest group consisted of the veterans of General Anders' Polish army, which had disbanded in Italy. These men, taken in as boarders by the Polish families, supplied needed workmen without further taxing the housing accommodation.

There are some factors which tend to make the Pass a unit and others that tend to divide it, especially along provincial lines. It is well to note that separate schools are not important as almost all towns have a Catholic majority and no move has ever been made towards establishing separate Protestant schools under the provisions of the Alberta constitution regarding religious minorities. In British Columbia separate schools may be opened on a voluntary basis. So, in 1922, a small parish school was opened in Fernie and a new building was erected in 1926. At present about seventy pupils in the lower grades attend this school. The older children attend the public school for their higher education. When all

children attend the same school there is no noticeable cleavage along national lines and the "melting pot" is enabled to do its work of assimilation more easily.¹

Because the Crow's Nest Pass lies in two provinces, provincial laws tend to keep both sections of the area distinct. With two different school systems, there is very little meeting of students or teachers except for occasional sports events. Qualifications for miners and officials are different so that there is not as much interchange of miners between Blairmore and Michel as there would be between Blairmore and Cadomin, the latter in Alberta but over four hundred miles distant.

The unions, however, have always considered the Pass as a unit and worked accordingly. Thus, in union matters, especially as regards wages, there is a close liaison between the two sections. Dominion government bureaus such as the Post Office Department and the National Employment Service always consider it to be one district. Wholesale houses in Fernie serve Alberta while those from Blairmore often ship their goods to Fernie. At one time Fernie bakeries have supplied the Alberta towns and at another the reverse was true.

In sports, especially the summer sports, the Pass has always been one area although there has been a tendency of late for Fernie to play a less important part. Michel, being only

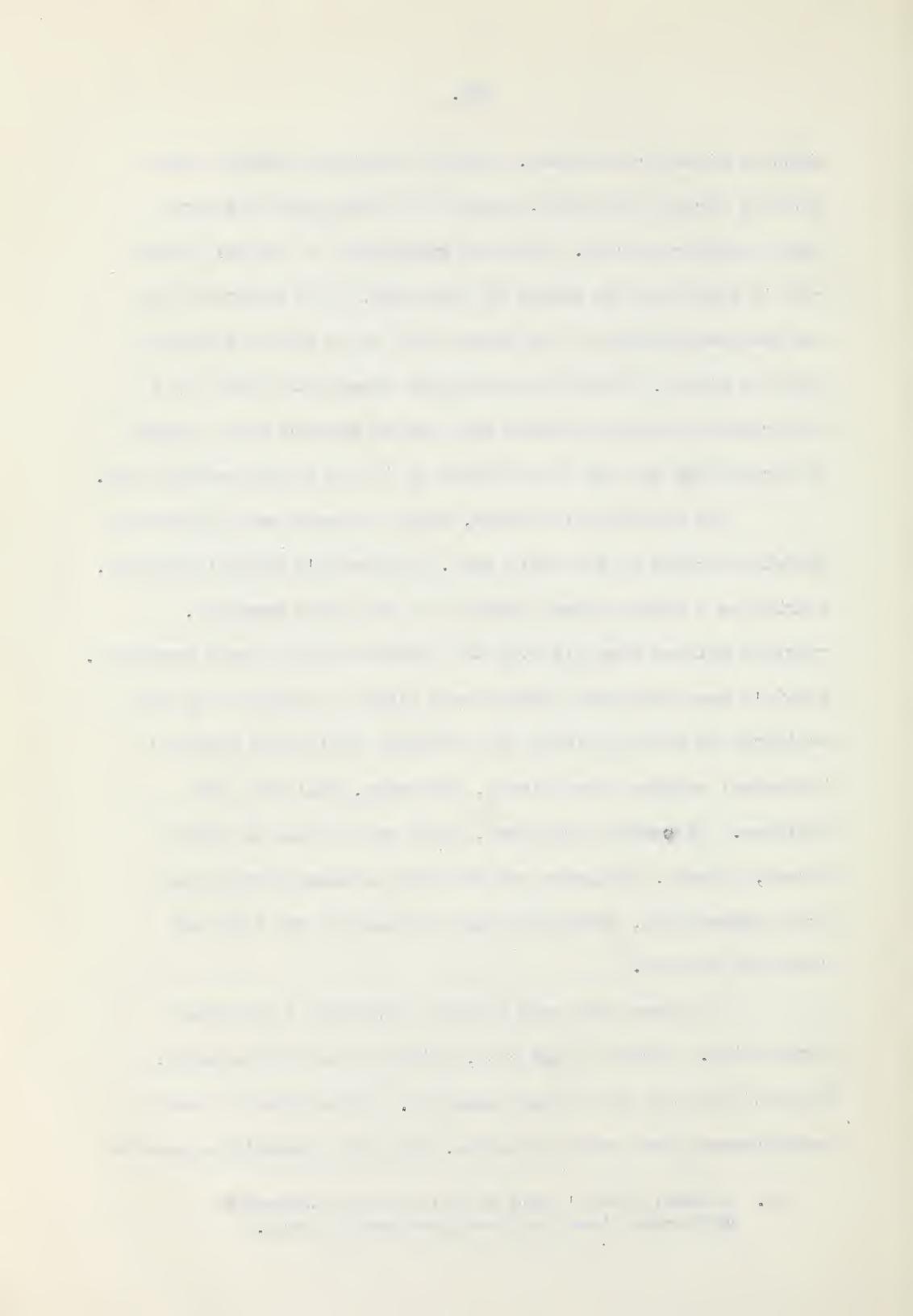
1. A Catholic separate school was built in Coleman in the period immediately preceding 1914 but was never used because of the Alberta law.

eighteen miles from Coleman, with all the other Alberta towns within a further ten miles, seems to be drawn more and more into the Alberta orbit. With the completion of the new covered rink in Natal for the season of 1950-1951, it is expected that the keen competition of the summer will be in future extended into the winter. Fernie is also going ahead with plans for a new arena so perhaps the Pass may soon be plunged into a frenzy of hockey from one end to the other as it was in the earlier days.

On the side of culture, music has been one of the chief unifying factors of the whole Pass. Blairmore's musical festival, started as a Sunday school festival in the early twenties, received entries from all over the southern part of both provinces. Fernie's band and school choirs were almost as familiar to the audiences as were the local West Canadian Collieries band and the school entries from Coleman, Blairmore, Hillcrest and Bellevue. On special occasions, bands were formed in which Michel, Coleman, Blairmore and Bellevue bandsmen formed one great aggregation, sometimes under the name of one town and sometimes another.¹

It seems that each town has developed a different personality. Fernie is the city, quietly aloof and superior, but with the look of the past about it. Michel-Natal is much less glamorous but more aggressive. The twin communities seem to

1. Coleman Miners' Band at the Calgary Stampede at different times has been just such a group.



feel that, like Australia, they have no history. They are keenly conscious of Fernie, resenting being considered an adjunct of that city, especially since their mines have employed more men and worked more days for many years past. Coleman is the "big town". It has consistently overestimated its population in every claim ever made. It probably has been the centre of senior hockey for more years than any other town. Its resentment is against Blairmore which, by virtue of being central, gains most government buildings such as telephone and customs offices and the courthouse and army barracks. Only by building the municipal hospital between the two towns could the consent of Coleman people be obtained, and even then the necessary two-thirds majority had to be made up by the almost unanimous votes of the other towns. Blairmore has been by far the most colorful town in the Pass, and has the faculty of making the headlines very often. In addition to the crises mentioned in connection with its early history, it received wide publicity by discharging its whole teaching staff in a feud with the Alberta Teachers' Alliance in 1925. Twice in recent years its high school has come out on strike -- the only Pass town to achieve this distinction.¹ It received national attention when it built its Tim Buck Boulevard in the communist thirties.

1. The most recent strike was to draw attention to the deplorable condition of the school and led to the forming of the first Home and School Association on the eastern slopes of the Pass.

Bellevue is a strange community. With one of the most public-spirited groups of people in the Pass and some of the most sagacious businessmen, it did not even consider incorporation until 1950.¹ Bellevue had the first covered rink on the eastern side and the first "big time" hockey team and is the only town to the present with artificial ice facilities. A Bellevue theatre owner gained control of theatres in every Pass town but Fernie. Its bakery and dairy practically cornered the trade of the Pass but Bellevue still remained a hamlet in a local improvement district. This has been unfortunate, for, lacking organization, the community has not been able to exert the influence upon Pass affairs that its population merits.

When Hillcrest had its own mine it was a particularly lively community, very interested in sports and music. The Hillcrest contingent was one of the most ardent in its support of hockey teams, especially those of Bellevue in the twenties and of Coleman in the thirties. It could be depended upon to arrive regardless of the weather.

The homes of the people of the Crow's Nest Pass have continually been improved. The miners did not live too long in the shacks which characterized the early days, but sufficient of these abodes remain to remind the inhabitants of the past. The houses improved as the families grew. It is difficult to

1. A plan for incorporation is now being considered.

look at Coleman's Bushtown today, with its neat blocks of rather attractive houses among many trees, and realize that twenty-five years ago it was a jumble of crooked lanes, shacks and barns. Fernie people look with wonder at pictures of the low log shacks of the "Russians" which existed before the fire of 1908. The improvements of the twenties continued into the thirties and the war period, mostly along the line of adding furnaces and bathrooms. To gain some idea of the extent of this, a count¹ was made along a street of about fifty houses in West Coleman (old Slavtown) now having a mixture of nationalities. It was found that about 90% of the houses were owned by the occupants, 70% of the houses had furnaces and 38% had bathrooms. It was interesting to note that no house with a bathroom was without a furnace, not because the miners are dirty but all the mines have washhouses and the need for a bathtub does not seem to be so urgent as the need for better heating. The percentage of bathrooms and furnaces is greater in the less crowded parts of town, but West Coleman would probably give a better picture of the average of the whole area. Bathrooms are increasing in number and all new homes are fully modern, but the war period (1939 to 1945) and the period since have not seen any great spate of building such as the prairie towns experienced. The need was

1. Made by students of Coleman high school as a social studies project.

just as great but the people seemed to have lost faith in

the future of their towns.¹ Blairmore probably had more new houses than any other town (apart from Sparwood),² but nothing approaching a building boom has been experienced.

One way in which the Pass lagged badly for an industrial area was in the construction of hospitals. One would have imagined that in an area of many accidents, the best of hospital care would have been available, but as far as the Pass towns were concerned this was not true. In the Alberta area only Coleman had anything that could be classed as a hospital. This was but a wooden building put up by the miners and not much bigger than a large house. Additions had been made to it from time to time but it was still much too small for the need. The other towns had less than this. Fernie's first hospital was much the same. One somewhat larger was built after the fire of 1908 but it still was insufficient to serve the area properly. A doctor returning from China in 1945 stated that the industrial concerns in China had much better hospitals for their coolie laborers. However, the situation was improved in 1948 and 1949 by the construction of two municipal hospitals. Fernie's Memorial Hospital and the Crow's Nest Pass Municipal Hospital between Blairmore and Coleman are as modern and well equipped as any in the country for communities of their size.

1. A plan for building cheap houses was sponsored by the C.N.P. Coal Company in Fernie which was so successful it is being studied by the other towns.

2. See below p. 202.

CHAPTER 17

THE PRESS

There is only one newspaper actually publishing regularly in the Crow's Nest Pass at the present time. (1951)¹ That paper is the Fernie Free Press, which was also the first publication to appear after the building of the railway. The first issue was put out on January 14th., 1899, and the Free Press was a vigorous newspaper right from the start. G. S. Henderson was its first editor but it changed hands several times in a few years, having in succession A. K. Cameron, A. S. Hacking, H. G. Watson and Geo. L. Pedlar as editors. Mr. J. R. A. Wallace, who joined the staff in its first year, finally took over the paper in 1905. He remained as publisher and later as editor and publisher for forty years, until May 1, 1945, when he sold out to Victor W. R. B. Ball who had published weeklies at various points in Alberta. Mr. Wallace is now living in retirement at Fernie. In spite of illness he was able to provide much material on the history of the town he loved so well.

The Free Press, like many papers of that time carried telegraphic news stories as well as local news and very early

1. A small bi-weekly mimeographed sheet, the Pass Herald, is published in Blairmore but in spite of considerable circulation and advertising it is not a newspaper.

was illustrated by remarkably clear cuts. The news of the city and district was printed in detail, and several of the editors took an active part in the life of the community even to serving on the city council. The paper did not fail to fight on many issues from a clash with the school principal over whether the schoolboys should wear shoes to differences with the "fighting"¹ ministers over the sinfulness of hotels. In keeping with the times, the early Free Press, like most papers, was strongly political, favoring the Conservatives, especially when other weeklies such as the Fernie Ledger espoused opposite causes. When the opposition journal ceased publication in 1919, the Free Press endeavored to give freedom of expression to all parties in its columns. It was burned out three times, in 1904, 1905 and 1908, losing everything including its files in the last fire. The files for this paper are complete at the Legislative Library in Victoria.

Other newspapers appeared in Fernie from time to time. The first was the Ledge, later the Ledger, in January 1905. The Ledge had been published at several points in the Kootenays by a colorful character named R. T. Lowery, who took the Slocan Ledge to Fernie and then dropped the first name. Mr. Lowery had a reputation in British Columbia as an unorthodox newsman

1. The early ministers of the west were often given this epithet because of their belligerent attitude towards those whom they considered to be evil.

much as Bob Edwards of Eye-Opener fame had in Alberta. Many references to him appear in the other newspapers of the time. Later, in 1905, D. V. Mott took over the Ledge as the Fernie Ledger and a Mr. Johns became editor briefly in 1907. He printed a short-lived paper of his own as John's Newspaper two years later. In 1908, the U.M.W.A. took over the Fernie Ledger re-naming it the District Ledger and from that time it was a bitter union organ. W. S. Stanley was the editor during the last few years until it ceased publication in 1919.

There is reference to three newspapers in short-lived Morrissey, the Mention (1902), the Miner (1902) and the Despatch (1903). M. Hockendorf, the editor of the Miner, was the only editor among those whose papers are on file, who announced the demise of his little sheet on April 23, 1902.

The Hosmer Times, begun in 1908, ran until the end of 1910 before going out of business. It was a very good paper giving excellent coverage of the news of its district. There was no masthead in the weekly stating who the editor was.

The Michel Reporter, starting somewhat later in 1908, was an aggressive newspaper attempting to show up the advantages of the twin communities, and to shake off the shackles of Fernie. George G. Meikle, the publisher, was as convinced of the great future of Michel and Natal, as the editor of the Free Press was that Fernie would be a western Pittsburgh.

On the other side of the Pass, there was just as much activity in the press field. The Frank Sentinel appeared in 1901, moved to Blairmore as the Blairmore Times, in 1903 and was still being published in 1905, but no record can be found of it after that. The Frank Paper, "Just a Newspaper, made by Mark Drumm", was first published in 1905 and was a very interesting journal. It was consistently moderate in its politics, rising only occasionally to the continued jibings of the Coleman Miner, but always strong in advancing the village of Frank. Mr. Drumm was lacking in a sense of humor but not in business sense. He characterized as a coarse joke the following quotation from his paper printed in a London newspaper; "the manager of the rink has his bottom in good shape and should have skating any day now,"¹ but he could not resist the opportunity to show the wide circulation of his weekly effort. Letters to the editor were always accepted -- as paid advertisements. Drumm ceased publishing the weekly in November 1909, but whether he had sold out to the Coleman Miner is not clear, as he announced the week before the last issue that the deal had fallen through.

The biting Coleman Miner first appeared in April of 1908 and was more vehement in its political attacks than any other paper. The editor, H. S. French, was a Conservative and damned all things Liberal. He was chiefly to blame for the storm

1. Frank Paper March 19, 1908. Mr. Drumm now lives in retirement in California.

raised over Joe Little's homesteading of Blairmore's graveyard site.¹ J. D. S. Barrett took over the Miner near the end of the year and with W. J. Bartlett, J. A. McDonald, and T. B. Brandon set up the Foothills Job Printing Company which aimed to serve the whole Pass exclusive of Fernie. They bought out the Michel Recorder² in 1909 and apparently the Frank Paper. The result was the printing of the Blairmore Enterprise and Frank Vindicator as one newspaper and the Bellevue Times in 1910 as a separate paper with nothing changed but the title. This ambitious attempt to form a newspaper chain failed and ended with Blairmore Enterprise alone in the field after the Coleman Miner was seized by the sheriff during the strike of 1911. W. J. Bartlett stayed with the Enterprise becoming sole owner in 1935, and was quoted far and wide for his trenchant wit. As time went by, the paper carried less and less news, and although the editor's fish stories received wide mention, the Enterprise ceased to be a real newspaper. When Bartlett died in May, 1946, his wife carried on for a time but sold out in August to J. R. McLeod who had been printer for Bartlett. The name was changed to the Blairmore Graphic, but although the printing office still operates, no newspapers are issued.

1. See above p. 65.

2. The Recorder succeeded the Reporter but no issues of it are on file.

In March, 1912, W. S. Stanley (later of the Fernie District Ledger) started the Coleman Bulletin, which ran until November, 1918, when it too failed. In 1921, the Coleman Journal appeared, with V. C. Dunning as editor, but J. D. S. Barrett returned to the scene with E. F. Gare and bought out Dunning. In 1924, Barrett sold his interest to Gare who in turn sold out to H. T. Halliwell in 1927. Mr. Halliwell remained in charge in Coleman for almost twenty years and built the paper up into a fine publication. In 1941, Mr. Halliwell moved to Macleod to publish the Gazette as well. In 1946, he sold the Journal to two younger men, Alexander Balloch and Thomas Holstead, who had grown up with the paper. Balloch left in December, 1948, and Holstead published alone until June, 1949, and then stopped publication although he continued the job-printing business.

Today, only the Free Press remains of all the weeklies, but is now changed to a smaller paper which makes no attempt to cover world news or change the political structure of the dominion, and which is highly regarded in the district for its interest in advancing the cause of its city.

The newspapers had many things in common. They were all dedicated to the "Boost, Do Not Knock" principle. For weeks the papers would carry banner heads on the mere hope of some new industry being located in their towns but would not mention the closing down of an established industry except by casual reference some time later in connection with another matter.

All tried to mould opinion by their editorials and were staunch supporters of either the Liberal or Conservative party. All were courageous and attacked what they considered wrong. The Fernie Ledger was fined for attacking a legal procedure in a case that was sub judice in 1909; the Blairmore Enterprise was sued for remarks about the manager of the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Blairmore in 1911, whose hostelry the editor had considered a disgrace, and the editor of the Coleman Journal was forced to sell out in 1927 because of his insistence that the town should publish its financial reports.¹ H. T. Halliwell, who had so violently opposed communism, shared the award given by the Trustees of Columbia University for meritorious service in combatting the attempts of the Social Credit government to control the press of the province in 1937. However, none of the papers (until the Blairmore Graphic and Coleman Journal were taken over by men brought up in the area) ever had any understanding of the miner and his problems and very rarely took the side of the unions on any issue. They obviously did not lack the courage, but could not find themselves sympathetic to the miners' views.

1. The town council cancelled all its job printing orders as a reprisal for Gare's attacks and made business unprofitable for the newspaper.

CHAPTER 18
THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

At the present time there is great uncertainty in the mining industry. No real optimism has been evident since the depression, except in the building of the two hospitals. The lack of house construction between 1940 and 1950 was not due to any excess of accommodation for there was a real shortage. Rather it was caused by the lack of confidence of the inhabitants in the future of their occupation. Even the reasonably steady work of the period since the beginning of the Korean war has not given rise to anything but the feeling that once the emergency is over the work will slacken off again.

The use of oil as fuel by the railways has been a threat to the coal mines since 1912.¹ In that year the Canadian parliament passed a law making the railway companies responsible for forest fires caused by their locomotives. It was found that oil burning engines caused fewer fires than those burning coal. With the discovery of oil at Leduc in Alberta in 1948 the railways were certain of an adequate supply and consequently accelerated the conversion from coal to oil-burning locomotives. Perhaps the cruellest blow of all was the fact that the railway through the Pass was one of the first lines to be converted to oil-burning. The residents, therefore, can see the danger to their livelihood

1. Justice Carroll et al. op. cit. p. 452.

at first hand. The railways drastically cut back their orders early in 1950 and Coleman, which depended almost entirely on the railway for the sale of its coal, suffered its first really slack time since the war boom. The preparations for defence have given increased work since. In the last few years the coke orders from Trail have been cut back¹ so that Coleman at present has only a handful of ovens operating, although Michel is still in full production.

A third factor is the danger of coal markets being cut by the export of Alberta natural gas into areas in British Columbia and the north-western states which now form a market for much Crow's Nest Pass coal. The Alberta mining towns have protested the proposed export in no uncertain language. The constantly rising freight rates on coal to Ontario also threatens to narrow the market.

It is thought that the oilfields are not likely to produce so abundantly in ten or twenty years and coal will then come into its own. The real danger is that the miners will leave the mines and when established elsewhere may not be easily persuaded to return to them -- as has happened in Britain. The coal companies are more optimistic, basing their hopes on a turbine engine using pulverized coal which is now being developed. This engine would be much

1. This was due in part to a surplus of coke built up by the smelter, but also to the poor quality of Coleman coke in the year or two preceding.

cheaper to operate than oil-burners or the newer diesels. The defence plans of the Canadian government will undoubtedly cause an increased demand for both coal and coke, at least temporarily, which may make up somewhat for the inroads of the oil industry and possibly overcome the bad effects of increased freight rates. As the chemical industry based on natural gas develops, there may also be an outlet for the by-products of coal which are not now used. The experiments in the United States on the manufacture of motor fuel from coal are being watched with interest.

Probably, the most optimistic "town" at the present time is Michel-Natal. It has this year (1951) built a large covered rink at the west end of Natal. The Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company plans to increase the number of by-product ovens and to do this needs the space now occupied by Michel. A few years ago the company laid out lots for building just beyond Natal¹ in the open space of the Elk Valley. Some modern houses were built there. Lots were offered to Michel-Natal residents at nominal prices, with the stipulation that good quality houses be built. At first the plan did not have much success but lately there has been a notable increase in building. In the meantime, as houses become vacant in Michel, the company sells them for a small sum on condition that they be torn down or hauled away. As part of the large school district centred at Fernie, the

1. This new area is called Sparwood after the former sawmill village at that place.

Sparwood-Natal area may have a new school built,¹ in which case there is every possibility that a town may finally be incorporated.

Interest in self government has increased recently.

Bellevue citizens met in 1950 to make application for incorporation as a village and, after one year, as a town. The town limits were set to include the river-bottom but not Hillcrest, which will however remain as part of the Bellevue-Hillcrest School District.

Early in 1951 a group of East Coleman (Bushtown) residents approached the town of Coleman with the intention of applying for permission to join that community. It was interesting to note that every name but one, of the leaders of the movement, was non-British in origin, showing a uniform spirit of leadership in the second and third generations. The taxes of the improvement district have increased gradually until they have reached the point where there is not a great difference between them and those of the town. The tax money of the improvement district is spent with little reference to the wishes of the taxpayers.² Perhaps also the democratic ideal of self-government is coming to have more meaning to the residents of the Pass.

A further movement which is being actively promoted by the Alberta government is an attempt to form one large school

1. Fernie also hopes to have new schools built under the same scheme.
2. There is no implication that the money is improperly spent.

district or school division, as has already been done in the British Columbia towns. It will be interesting to see if the towns will be able to forget their animosity towards each other, especially when a strong civic government in Bellevue will be able to exert pressure.

The Alberta government is at present building a first class paved highway through the Pass towns. The British Columbia government is doing the same, having concentrated thus far on building fine bridges across the many streams. Perhaps, after almost a century, the expression coined about the Crow's Nest Pass by Blakiston, "a very bad road and seldom used", may become an interesting but highly inaccurate statement. The road north of Coleman to Kananaskis may be extended southward to Waterton Park so that the Pass may yet become the tourist centre that early travellers believed it would be.¹ Then, perhaps, the people will become conscious of their mountains and come to know them better, for now very few people know the names of the peaks and in fact many prominent peaks have no discoverable names at all. The boards of trade of the Alberta towns have been making some effort in this direction in the past few years, but not sufficient to create any great interest. A skiing club formed in the Pass a

1. The towns have such a bad inferiority complex about their attractions, that a hotel in Coleman, a town surrounded by beautiful peaks, has on its walls large pictures of mountains in Banff National Park.

few years ago has made some progress, having a fine ski-slide at Blairmore where it conducts annual competitions. Skiers from Lethbridge have already chartered special trains to take them to ski on this slope. Perhaps the Pass may someday become one of the great tourist centres of the west, for it is the site of one of the most spectacular and storied landslides in the world.

The people of the Pass may feel a sense of foreboding over the immediate prospects of the main industry, but they do not lose their love of their rugged home nor their faith that the coal reserves of the Crow's Nest Pass will eventually become of great importance to Canada. If use is ever made of the iron resources of the west, whether it be at Burmis, Kitchener, Kimberley or the Pacific coast, the Pass will benefit, for the two sections are and have been for years, the main centres of coking and steam coal in their respective provinces.

Appendix

Table I

National Origins of School Children Based on Origin of Father

| | Brit. | Ukr. | Slov. | Ital. | Polish | Belg. | Dut. |
|-------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|----------|-------|-------|
| Coleman Grades 2-12 | 159 | 49 | 27 | 59 | 50 | 10 | 7 |
| Blairmore " 7-12 | 58 | 5 | 13 | 17 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| Fernie All Grades | 487 | 21 | - | 52 | 29 | - | - |
| Bellevue Grades 4-12 | 90 | 18 | 30 | 22 | 15 | 5 | - |
| Hillcrest Grades 4-12 | 40 | 9 | 9 | 18 | 4 | - | - |
| Michel-Natal All Grades | 159 | 22 | -* | 79 | 9 | - | - |
| Cole. | Czech | Scand. | Russ. | French | Fr. Can. | Germ. | Misc. |
| Cole. | 9 | 10 | 20 | 8 | 15 | 1 | 8 |
| Blair. | 12 | 8 | - | 8 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Fernie | - | 7 | 21 | 9 | - | 10 | 38 |
| Belle. | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | - | 5 | 5 |
| Hill. | 8 | 5 | 1 | 2 | - | 7 | 3 |
| Mich.Natal | - | 12 | 12 | 10 | - | 20 | 85 |

* Michel-Natal probably shows Slovaks as Miscellaneous.

Among the miscellaneous are such groups as Romanian, Yugoslav, Chinese, Japanese, Lithuanian, Latvian, Austrian, Hungarian, Swiss, Spanish, Greek, Syrian and others.

Table II

Percentages of pupils of British origin in the various towns as shown by the figures in Table I.

| | | | |
|--------------|-----|-------------------------|-------|
| Coleman | 159 | British of 506 pupils | 31.4% |
| Blairmore | 58 | British of 144 pupils | 40.2% |
| Fernie | 507 | British of 704 pupils * | 72.0% |
| Bellevue | 90 | British of 206 pupils | 43.6% |
| Hillcrest | 40 | British of 106 pupils | 37.7% |
| Michel-Natal | 159 | British of 408 pupils | 39.0% |

* The 70 pupils of the Catholic school in Fernie were added to the total in Table I and fifty were assumed to be non-British to give a better picture. Exact figures were not available for the Catholic school.

Because the smaller children were not included for Blairmore, Bellevue and Hillcrest, the percentages may not be accurate. See Table IV below

Table III

National origins of both parents of one elementary grade in Coleman to show the extent of intermarriage of national groups.

Number of children in the class -- 38

| <u>Father</u> | <u>Mother</u> | <u>Number</u> |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| British | British | 11 |
| Slovak | Slovak | 4 |
| Polish | Polish | 2 |
| Ukrainian | Ukrainian | 2 |
| French | French | 1 |
| | | --total 20 |
| <u>Intermarried</u> | | |
| English | Czech | 1 |
| English | Polish | 1 |
| English | Yugoslav | 1 |
| English | French | 1 |
| Welsh | Italian | 1 |
| Irish | German | 1 |
| Ukrainian | Polish | 1 |
| Slovak | Finnish | 1 |
| Slovak | Ukrainian | 1 |
| Italian | Slovak | 2 |
| Czech | German | 1 |
| Italian | English | 1 |
| Ukrainian | Slovak | 1 |
| Czech | Slovak | 1 |
| Polish | Scotch | 1 |
| Polish | English | 1 |
| French | Irish | 1 |
| | | --total 18 |

Table IV

To show the relationship between British and other national groups in different school divisions. Coleman only.

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Elementary Grades (2-6); 85 British of 289 pupils | 29.4% |
| Intermediate Grades (7-9); 43 British of 130 pupils | 33.0% |
| High School Grades (10-12); 31 British of 87 pupils | 35.6% |
| Whole School | 159 British of 506 pupils 31.4% |

Table V

The number of Men Employed and the Total Coal Production in the Crow's Nest Pass Mines during Certain Years

| Year | Number of men employed | | | Production in tons | |
|------|------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-----------|
| | B.C. | Alta. | Total | B.C. | Alta. |
| 1901 | 989 | -* | - | 390,000 | - |
| 1902 | 1192 | - | - | 394,000 | - |
| 1907 | 2290 | - | - | 877,000 | - |
| 1908 | 2524 | - | - | 883,000 | - |
| 1910 | 3111 | - | - | 1,365,000 | 1,608,000 |
| 1912 | 2401 | 2261 | 4662 | 1,261,000 | 1,525,000 |
| 1913 | 2669 | 2331 | 5000 | 1,333,000 | 1,849,000 |
| 1914 | 2397 | 2047 | 4444 | 955,000 | 1,240,000 |
| 1918 | 1317 | 1721 | 3038 | 731,000 | 1,601,000 |
| 1919 | 1369 | 1935 | 3304 | 559,000 | 1,188,000 |
| 1920 | 1582 | 2219 | 3801 | 847,000 | 1,776,000 |
| 1921 | 1774 | 1825 | 3599 | 760,000 | 1,272,000 |
| 1922 | 1538 | 2080 | 3618 | 554,000 | 1,027,660 |
| 1924 | 1147 | 2023 | 3170 | 274,000 | 913,000 |
| 1927 | 1494 | 1801 | 3296 | 908,000 | 1,443,000 |
| 1928 | 1621 | 2029 | 3650 | 1,001,000 | 1,639,000 |
| 1929 | 1503 | 1863 | 3366 | 887,000 | 1,553,000 |
| 1930 | 1252 | 1960 | 3212 | 689,000 | 1,134,000 |
| 1931 | 1211 | 1715 | 2926 | 661,000 | 952,000 |
| 1932 | 1001 | 1612 | 2613 | 587,000 | 714,000 |
| 1933 | 698 | 1615 | 2313 | 477,000 | 876,000 |
| 1936 | 606 | 1888 | 2494 | 470,000 | 1,310,000 |
| 1938 | 693 | 1885 | 2578 | 434,000 | 1,275,000 |
| 1941 | 921 | 1903 | 2823 | 1,026,000 | 2,021,000 |
| 1945 | 1067 | 2122 | 3189 | 880,000 | 1,856,000 |
| 1948 | 1264 | 2474 | 3738 | 1,290,000 | 1,917,000 |

X B.C. figures are long tons (2240 lb.) Alberta figures are short tons (2,000 lb.)

* Figures not given for this area in Mines Branch reports

Table VI

Comparison of Crow's Nest Field with the Sydney Field in Nova Scotia (the largest eastern coalfield). Dominion Bureau of Statistics

Production in Short Tons (2,000#)

| <u>Coal District</u> | <u>1941</u> | <u>1943</u> | <u>1945</u> | <u>1947</u> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Crow's Nest Field | 3,170,334 | 3,001,292 | 2,830,547 | 3,115,811 |
| Sydney Field N.S. | 5,384,375 | 4,435,018 | 3,688,657 | 3,071,135 |

Table VII

The Population of the Crow's Nest Pass -- Dominion Census

| <u>Town or District</u> | <u>1901</u> | <u>1911</u> | <u>1921</u> | <u>1931</u> | <u>1941</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Blairmore | 231 | 1137 | 1552 | 1692 | 1731 |
| Coleman | - | 1557 | 1590 | 1704 | 1870 |
| Frank | 19 | 806 | 401 | 268 | 204 |
| Lille ¹ | - | 303 | - | - | - |
| L.I.D. No. 71 ² | - | 1770 | 3685 | 4282 | 4149 |
| Fernie ³ | 1640 | 3416 | 2802 | 2732 | 2545 |
| Elk-Flathead | <u>476</u> | <u>4812</u> | <u>6074</u> | <u>4814</u> | <u>4016</u> |
| Totals | 4,267 | 12,901 | 16,104 | 15,429 | 14,515 |

1. Added to Local Improvement District No. 71 for later censuses.

2. L.I.D. No. 71 includes everything in Alberta from Burmis to Crowsnest, not included in Coleman, Blairmore or Frank.

3. This is the whole area east of the Elk River and north of 49 degrees latitude. Known as Fernie District until 1911, it was changed to the present district and name for the 1921 census. In 1901, Fernie District was probably Michel only.

Table VIII

Explosions in the Crow's Nest Pass.

| <u>Town</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Number Killed</u> |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Fernie | 1902 May 22 | 128 |
| 2. Michel | 1904 January 9 | 7 |
| 3. Coleman | 1907 April 3 | 3 |
| 4. Bellevue | 1910 December 9 | 30 |
| 5. Hillcrest | 1914 June 19 | 189 |
| 6. Fernie | 1915 January 2 | 1 |
| 7. Michel | 1916 August 8 | 12 |
| 8. Fernie | 1917 April 5 | 34 |
| 9. Hillcrest | 1926 September 19 | 2 |
| 10. Coleman | 1926 November 23 | 10 |
| 11. Michel | 1938 July 5 | 3 |
| Total killed | | 419 |

Table IX

Origin of Names of the Communities of the Crow's Nest Pass

| | | |
|------------|----|---|
| Bellevue | -- | Named by J.J.Fleutot of West Canadian Collieries from "belle vue" (beautiful view); a descriptive term. |
| Blairmore | -- | Named for railway contractors Blair and More or a name ending in -more. |
| Burmis | -- | Compounded from Burns and Kemiss, early prospectors of the area. |
| Coal Creek | -- | Named after the creek originally so-called by Michael Phillipps for its coal outcrops. |
| Coleman | -- | Named after Florence Coleman Flumerfelt, the daughter of the president of the townsite company. |
| Corbin | -- | Named for D.C.Corbin of Spokane, the first president of the company developing the area. |
| Crowsnest | -- | Named by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the pass upon whose height of land it is situated. |
| Fernie | -- | Named in honor of the two brothers William and Peter Fernie who first did extensive development of the mines there. |
| Frank | -- | Named after the Hon. H.L. Frank of Butte, Montana, who formed the Canadian American Company to develop the mines there. |
| Hillcrest | -- | Named for C.P.Hill who organized Hillcrest Mines Limited, and from its position atop a hill. |
| Hosmer | -- | Named in honor of Charles R. Hosmer of Montreal, a director of the Canadian Pacific Railways. |
| Lille | -- | Named by West Canadian Collieries Limited after the city of that name in France. |
| Michel | -- | Named after Michael Phillipps, the discoverer of the pass who was often known as "Michel". |
| Morrissey | -- | Named for Joe Morrissey who explored the Crow's Nest Pass with Phillipps. |
| Natal | -- | Named by the Canadian Pacific Railway, probably for Natal in South Africa. |
| Passburg | -- | So named because it stood at the eastern entrance to the Crow's Nest Pass. |
| Sentinel | -- | Formerly Sentry, from Mount Sentry (or Sentinel) on the south shore of Crowsnest Lake. |
| Sparwood | -- | Named by Canadian Pacific Railway engineers because the trees in the vicinity were suitable for spars for vessels. |

Table X

| <u>Dates of Establishment of Accounting Post Offices</u> | | 1 |
|--|-------|-------------------------------|
| Bellevue | ..... | June 15, 1907 |
| Blairmore | ..... | December 1, 1899 |
| Coal Creek | ..... | November 1, 1903 |
| Coleman | ..... | May 1, 1904 |
| Corbin | ..... | July 1, 1909 |
| Crowsnest | ..... | June 1, 1900 |
| Fernie | ..... | January 1, 1899 |
| Frank | ..... | August 1, 1901 |
| Hillcrest | ..... | January 2, 1908 |
| Hosmer | ..... | March 1, 1907 |
| Lille | ..... | February 1, 1906 |
| Michel | ..... | March 1, 1900 |
| Morrissey | | Summer office only in 1903 |
| Natal (New Michel) | | June 1, 1909 |
| Passburg | | June 1, 1908 |

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Michel Reporter

Morrissey Miner

Lethbridge Herald







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